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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 8 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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96-80890 (E)

In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), President, Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (A/51/124-E/1996/44; E/1996/43, E/1996/64 and Add.2)

Mr. STOBY (Director, Division for Policy Coordination and Economic and Social Council Affairs), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on progress in the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (E/1996/64), said that, in addition to concentrating on the three focus areas identified in paragraph 54 of the resolution, it also provided updated information on the country strategy note process, field level coordination and an overview of resource trends.

An essential factor for the successful implementation of the resolution was the initial interpretation given to its broad provisions by the United Nations system. He was, therefore, pleased to draw attention to the positive actions taken by the executive heads of agencies and to the statement by the Administrative Committee on Coordination, contained in annex I, strongly committing the entire system to the full implementation of the resolution. That commitment was also evidenced in its endorsement of the management process contained in annex II, and a number of specific steps being taken to strengthen the resident coordinator system.

While implementation of resolution 50/120 had been launched at a time of declining resources for development, and many feared that the changes in the system would not be accompanied by the needed resources, the Secretariat was confident that it could meet the challenges of the next century and the changing requirements of recipient countries. General Assembly resolution 50/227 constituted an important advance introducing effective steps for considering how best to generate more predictable and increased funding of operational activities. The three dimensions of resources, governance and increased

efficiency were reflected in resolution 50/120, and experience had shown that progress must be made on all three fronts in order to achieve the goal of a truly responsive international development cooperation system.

Concerning the status of the country strategy note, the number of Government-approved strategy notes had reached 15, and the great majority of countries had chosen to pursue the process. For countries that had chosen not to do so, measures had been put in place for fully implementing paragraph 14 of resolution 50/120; those measures were listed in annex II to the report. In addition, a desk review of the country strategy review process, the programme approach, national execution and other tools in operational activities had begun which would yield new guidance elements for the field. A similar approach would be taken to the review of the resident coordinator system and field coordination mechanisms.

The General Assembly had decided (para. 56 of the resolution) that, as an integral part of the next comprehensive triennial policy review, there should be an evaluation of the impact of operational activities for development. The report therefore provided some indications as to how that might be done, and additional information could be provided to any delegations that wished to learn more about the methodology and possible scope of these studies.

Ms. BROWNE (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that improved coordination at the country and Headquarters level was a central part of United Nations reform and should lead to more genuine partnership between Governments and the United Nations system through more effective use of resources aimed at expanding national ownership of development, capacity-building and increasing national execution. The strengthening of the resident coordinator system was crucial if those aims were to be achieved. Decentralization of authority and harmonization among agencies was also important. Her delegation also urged the Funds, Programmes and specialized agencies to support the resident coordinator system with financial and human resources, and strongly encouraged the trend towards broadening the pool of eligible candidates as requested in paragraph 37 (a) of General Assembly resolution 50/120.

The European Union attached great importance to the formulation of country strategy notes as a means of promoting coordination and implementation of national development objectives. Revised guidelines on the formulation of

country strategy notes should reflect the view that such notes should be the main instrument for the elaboration of poverty eradication plans and programmes.

Simplification and harmonization of United Nations procedures was necessary to facilitate and increase national execution. According to paragraph 23 of the Secretary-General's report (E/1996/64), United Nations system representatives in the field had referred to the fact that they did not have the flexibility to revise procedures formulated at their respective headquarters. Her delegation would appreciate additional details from the Secretariat as to how that problem could be addressed.

The European Union had consistently viewed the establishment of common premises as one means through which coordination could be improved. Much remained to be done to raise the target for achieving common premises as requested in paragraph 44 of the resolution and she felt that time-frames should be established for the implementation of that and other provisions of the resolution. There was also much scope for improvement in the area of shared services.

In order to improve the impact of United Nations operational activities in the field, greater emphasis should be placed at all levels on monitoring and evaluation and the application of lessons learned. There was a need to develop national capacities to collect and assess data and to strengthen national evaluation capacity. There was a parallel need to strengthen capacities to perform effective programme, project and financial monitoring and impact evaluation of operational activities funded by the United Nations, particularly as they related to national execution. The problems of monitoring in the field in relation to national execution should be addressed in order to ensure a flexible approach to the monitoring and application of projects and programmes.

The Funds and Programmes should collaborate more on the development of a more coordinated and integrated approach to monitoring and evaluation. The common approach to country assessment was a step in the right direction. While there was a need to develop a culture and practice of internal monitoring and evaluation, the value of periodic external evaluations should also be recognized.

Her delegation would appreciate further information on the role of the Joint Inspection Unit in relation to the evaluation divisions of the Funds and

Programmes, and what follow-up had been given to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit.

Mr. CHULKOV (Russian Federation) welcomed the steps taken to implement the General Assembly resolutions resulting from the triennial review of operational activities. ACC and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) played a leading role in coordinating that response. While welcoming the specific goals and time-frames for the implementation of resolution 50/120 proposed in the report his delegation was concerned, to see that there had not been any improvement in the harmonization of procedures in the field.

There was increasing awareness of how effective increased use of common premises and services could be in lowering expenses and eliminating duplication of effort. His delegation noted with satisfaction the marked increase in the number of countries where United Nations agencies shared premises.

His delegation attached great importance to the question of effective monitoring and evaluation of operational activities. The country strategy note was also key to national execution and programming. Real progress in that direction depended on the commitment of recipient Governments, however.

In the context of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120, United Nations agencies and funds must continue to strengthen their coordination at the country level through the resident coordinator system. His delegation welcomed the decision by UNDP to allocate 1.7 per cent of its regular budget to support United Nations system-wide coordination and to strengthen the presence of resident coordinators.

Ms. SHAM POO (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that the ultimate purpose of reform was to enhance the Fund's capacity to meet the basic needs of children and to advocate more effectively for the protection of children's rights. Reform was not a one-time undertaking but a continuing commitment to revitalization and enhanced efficiency.

The Fund had joined in translating the broad directives of the General Assembly and of the Council into practical guidelines for action at the country level. The implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 had provided the basis for much closer collaboration with other United Nations agencies in the field, particularly in relation to the inter-agency task forces and the System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. A great deal of work had been done to harmonize and simplify rules and procedures and there had been a significant

commitment of staff time and analytical capacity to support Governments and the resident coordinator system in the preparation of the country strategy notes.

With respect to common premises and administrative services, UNICEF remained firmly committed to maximizing the number of locations with common premises and administrative services where such a solution was cost-effective. In that regard, greater use should be made of country-level inter-agency teams in the management of common premises and the adoption of operational and administrative decisions. Country-level capacity should also be strengthened for the conduct of evaluations and thematic analyses at both the regional and global level.

While important milestones and targets had been achieved, much still remained to be done in a number of key areas. First, procedures and practices in the field needed to be continuously updated and successful experiences shared and replicated. Second, UNICEF would continue to support the resident coordinator system at the field level through active participation in all relevant country-level mechanisms. It would also continue to nominate its most experienced mid-career country representatives for resident coordinator posts. However, since its administrative and programme support budget was already at the minimum level consistent with delivery of approved country programmes, field offices could not provide direct financial contributions. Third, collaborative mechanisms must be truly system-wide and country team subcommittees and thematic groups must strive for the most collaborative methods of operation, taking into account respective mandates, abilities and skills. The output of the resident coordinator system, including annual reports, must better reflect the inputs, views and concerns of the entire system. Finally, much of what had been developed at the global level now needed more effective application in the field. In the inter-agency task forces and the Special Initiative on Africa, the United Nations at last had an overall framework for collaborative programming with which host Governments and country offices must henceforth be more closely involved.

Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that other United Nations bodies should follow the example of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF and establish appropriate mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the programmes which had emerged from recent global conferences.

Certain provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120 still remained to be implemented, particularly those related to the harmonization and simplification of the rules and procedures for operational activities. The diversity of those rules and procedures militated against effective collaboration, placed a considerable burden on Governments in terms of time and efforts and undermined the aim of strengthening national capacity.

There were also problems in harmonizing the various rules and accountability procedures of the different development assistance partners, each of which had its own project assessment and project formulation missions. Accordingly, he drew attention to the need to harmonize the reporting formats and requirements of the various donors as well as their monitoring and evaluation systems in order to ease the burden on the limited human resources of Member States. It was also important to strengthen the national and evaluation capacities of recipient countries to enable them effectively to analyse the contribution of operational activities to their development efforts.

Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) recalled that General Assembly resolution 50/120 stressed the need to mobilize resources and to reform the operational activities system. Those two goals were closely related and equally important. The management plan would no doubt facilitate implementation of the resolution, and he called on United Nations agencies and Governments to collaborate in its smooth implementation.

Simplification and harmonization of rules and procedures constituted an important part of reform. Regrettably, little progress had been made in that area. Moreover, during the process of reforming themselves, some bodies had actually generated more complexity. He urged the bodies and agencies concerned to retain a global perspective so as not to lose sight of the overall strategy of reform within the United Nations system of operational activities for development.

His delegation attached particular importance to monitoring and evaluation of the follow-up to global conferences. An effective mechanism needed to be established to carry out the work effectively and national capacity had to be strengthened. The United Nations system should continue to give priority to strengthening and making full use of the national capacity of developing countries

Mr. ANDO (United Nations Population Fund) welcomed the progress made by the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) in harmonizing programme activities. Progress was also being made in the harmonization of programming policies and procedures and work had begun on the development of common guidelines for project formulation and appraisal and for the administration of national project personnel. Most importantly, JCGP partners had agreed on common draft guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of operational activities. Despite the progress achieved, however, the United Nations needed to move faster towards the harmonization of policies and procedures.

With respect to monitoring and evaluation procedures, the Fund was currently revising those procedures with a view to simplifying processes and documentation, ensuring accountability through the decentralization of authority, and achieving greater emphasis on substantive and qualitative aspects of programme delivery. As part of those efforts, the Fund was developing indicators for programme performance in order to more effectively monitor the achievements of the goals of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). It was also in the process of identifying indicators and methodologies for evaluating the impact of population programmes. Given the focus of ICPD on reproductive health, the Fund had organized a special training course on the evaluation of reproductive health programmes.

The Fund also continued to promote increased collaboration with other development partners in the area of monitoring and evaluation of its activities. It was equally concerned about ways to enhance national capacity for monitoring and evaluation activities and, to that end, UNFPA country offices were organizing an increasing number of training courses for national project managers.

With regard to shared premises and services, the Fund had always collaborated most closely with UNDP. Currently, 82 per cent of UNFPA country offices shared premises with UNDP; the two also shared a number of administrative and financial services, both at headquarters and at the country level, including, inter alia, accounting and personnel administration, travel management information systems, local procurement and legal services. There were also many other noteworthy efforts taking place within JCGP and system-wide, and the Fund was committed to further strengthening inter-agency coordination and collaboration.

Mr. BEN SLIMANE (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that effective 1 January 1996 WFP had been empowered to adopt a programme approach and that special arrangements were being made to harmonize its programming cycle with those of Governments and JCGP partners. However, harmonizing development efforts within the United Nations system and with the plans of Governments could encounter certain difficulties. It was not always easy to streamline the various rules and procedures of the different partners. For example, it was difficult to harmonize the response of WFP to large-scale emergencies with the activities of other agencies.

With regard to common premises and other administrative services, 75 per cent of WFP country offices shared common premises with other United Nations organizations and the Programme remained committed to common administrative services wherever those were feasible and cost-effective.

Lastly, given their cost-effectiveness, monitoring and evaluation activities were an essential management tool for both the recipient country and partner agencies. There was therefore a need for better programming of such activities at the field level and, in that connection, WFP had developed new monitoring and reporting systems and a series of indicators aimed at achieving that objective. The Programme was also an active member of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation, in which national capacity-building, specific evaluation issues and relevant methodologies were discussed and agreed upon.

MR. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) said that regarding the simplification and harmonization of rules and procedures, his delegation welcomed the decision by the Administrative Committee on Coordination to reinforce cooperation between United Nations bodies through the resident coordinator system, and was pleased to note that a series of updated and interlinked guidelines were to be issued on country strategy notes, the programme approach, national execution, and the functioning of the resident coordinator system.

However, the degree of simplification and harmonization of procedures that could be achieved was somewhat restricted by the multiplicity of rules and procedures currently in force. Governments were obliged to devote too much time and energy to complex reporting procedures which not only posed a serious obstacle to cooperation but also proved damaging to national capacity-building. The sheer number of reports that had to be submitted, the model formats that had to be used, and the monitoring and evaluation systems that had to be set up

placed a heavy burden on recipient countries, whose human resources were limited.

His delegation believed that country strategy notes were a useful means of fostering exchange and coordination between various development partners. He therefore supported efforts to improve the country strategy note system by highlighting the advantages that could be reaped by integrating operational activities with national priorities and by involving national authorities in the development process. To that end, United Nations bodies should organize national workshops for civil servants and officials and awaken their interest in concerted action plans.

Regarding coordination and its impact on operational activities and the management plan, his delegation noted that a number of measures had been taken to strengthen the resident coordinator system. In particular, resident coordinators should avail themselves of common databases to plan, report on and monitor their activities. Regarding a general approach for evaluating the impact of operational activities, his Government believed that the United Nations system should take as a basis for that purpose the results achieved in implementing the programmes of action adopted at the recent major international conferences. Such an approach would make it necessary to take account of evaluations conducted by those countries themselves. In any event the United Nations system should integrate national elements into any evaluation it conducted in respect of a particular country in order to align positions, reduce divergencies and avoid misunderstandings.

The issue of funding was still crucial, and the General Assembly had pointed out that a substantial increase in the level of resources for development activities was required. Funding should be predictable, sustained, assured and in proportion to the growing needs of development countries.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) commended the Secretary-General on the frankness of his report, and in particular his remarks on the burdensome nature of reporting requirements.

His Government believed that the establishment of common premises was a laudable goal, but warned against the danger of committing funds to long-term construction projects during the current period of financial stringency. The agencies forming the Joint Consultative Group on Policy should conduct further coordinated programme reviews and identify other areas where effective

cooperation could be undertaken. The Secretariat should also provide additional information on the extent of progress towards strengthening the resident coordinator system.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.25
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Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 25th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 8 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

CONTENTS

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued) (A/51/124-E/1996/44; E/1996/43, E/1996/64 and Add.2)

(a) FOLLOW-UP TO POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (continued)

Mr. DISEKO (South Africa) said that his delegation fully associated itself with the statement made by the Chairman of the Group of 77 and China.

The United Nations system had become actively involved in South Africa, where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office alone had a core fund of $15 million for its activities during the current financial year. At the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), President Mandela had pledged a contribution of 875,000 rand to UNDP and 100,000 rand to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). South Africa provided common premises to the United Nations system agencies and covered the rental costs.

His Government was nearing completion of a country strategy note, and cooperation with the resident coordinator system would be entered through, inter alia, monthly reports by the resident coordinator to his Government. There was no doubt that the simplification and harmonization of the rules and procedures of field-level agencies would greatly enhance cooperation, including with non-governmental organizations. The advantages, especially in terms of operational activities in remote, rural and largely illiterate communities, could not be overemphasized. His Government welcomed the continuing consultations between the United Nations system and national Governments and supported many of the Secretary-General's recommendations.

His Government had decided to integrate all the official development assistance it received into its overall budgetary process, thereby enhancing its capacity for approval, monitoring and evaluation of the relevant projects.

His delegation strongly believed that General Assembly resolutions 50/120 and 50/227 formed the basis for further improvements in the operational

activities of the United Nations system, activities which must be carried out for the benefit of developing countries, at their request, and must be funded on a predictable, continuous and assured basis. The persistent insufficiency of resources, especially in the context of the ever-growing needs of recipient countries, was a cause for serious concern. African and least developed countries were most in need of funds and must be given priority in any funding modality. His delegation called for the enhancement of the absorptive capacities of the African and the least developed countries; otherwise, there was a risk of resources being diverted to recipient countries with greater absorptive capacity.

His Government regarded funding for operational activities as one of the building blocks to redress the inequalities inherited from his country's apartheid past and to launch it into an era of sustained and balanced economic growth and development.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that it was critically important to receive feedback on implementation both from the authorities of the programme countries and from the field offices of the United Nations system, so as to ensure that work did not proceed in a vacuum at the headquarters level. In connection with the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) statement and the management process for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (E/1996/64, annexes I and II), her delegation stressed the importance of full consultation with national authorities and field representatives, including those of the specialized agencies, as well as the need for delegations at headquarters level to have access to the management process. Attention must be paid to ensuring that the process of revising ACC guidelines did not result in delays in programming and resource allocation which would adversely affect the plans and programmes of developing countries. Her delegation was concerned about the slow progress in the simplification and harmonization of the complex rules and procedures which posed problems for developing countries, particularly those with limited capacity and expertise; immediate attention must be paid to that issue. It would be worth considering the recommendation for greater use of national budgetary and financial systems in that respect.

On the subject of impact evaluation, her delegation stressed the importance of paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 50/120. Referring to annex II, section E, of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/64), she asked what

was meant by the sentence "Resources and funding issues need to be dealt with at the governmental level". Her Government had always discussed resources and funding issues at the national level. She also asked what was meant by the words "linkages to reforms in governance" in the last line of that section.

Mr. GERUS (Belarus) said that the Council's reform process must be based not only on General Assembly resolution 50/120 but also on General Assembly resolution 50/227. It was especially important to enhance the role of the Council as the central mechanism for coordinating the work of the United Nations system and its specialized agencies and for monitoring the work of subsidiary bodies in the economic and social fields.

Stable and adequate financing was a prerequisite for the success of operational activities, not only to enhance their effectiveness, as advocated in paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 50/120, but also to be able to expand the number of recipient countries. The growing needs of developing countries and the special needs of States with economies in transition must be taken into account. The Council must therefore engage in a permanent dialogue with the entire donor community. At the same time, new mechanisms for enhancing the use of existing resources must be found, particularly through a concentration of the efforts of all agencies of the United Nations development system at the local level on the basis of the priorities determined by recipient countries. It was also important to increase coordination at the regional and subregional levels, develop mechanisms to promote the national implementation of regional programmes, and implement paragraph 21 of General Assembly resolution 50/120.

His delegation attached importance to the full implementation of paragraph 30 of General Assembly resolution 50/120. As the experience of UNDP had shown, technical assistance projects provided an opportunity to train national experts and managerial staff to international standards, and in that regard his delegation looked forward to the completion of the common guidelines at the field level for the recruitment, training and remuneration of national project personnel referred to in paragraph 26 of resolution 50/120. The general approach of entrusting national Governments with basic responsibility for coordinating national development strategies with international technical assistance programmes was sound, provided that the resident coordinator system facilitated and supported that work.

The implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 would prove impossible without the strengthening of the system of accountability through the establishment of clearer responsibility for programme implementation, enhanced responsibility of programme managers for the effective management of human and financial resources, and effective training of personnel in the management of financial resources.

Mr. LAUZON (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP attached the highest priority to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and, as Chair of the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) for 1996-1997, would seek to ensure that all subgroups of JCGP helped further the implementation of the resolution in their respective areas.

In the area of coordination, the Executive Board of UNDP had allocated 1.7 per cent of the core resources for support to the United Nations system and aid coordination. UNDP had been working to support the implementation of General Assembly resolution 51/120 at the country level, principally through the resident coordinator system. As Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development, the Administrator had been assisting the Secretary-General in ensuring effective follow-up at the inter-agency level to international conferences in the context of ACC.

Regarding programming matters, he said that UNDP, with its JCGP partners, had made common policy statements and had also prepared guidelines, a training package and a training video. It was contributing to work on common system guidelines on monitoring and evaluation using the programme approach.

In the area of management, personnel and administration, JCGP was aiming at a target of 68 common premises by the end of 1997. UNDP expected the model for common services established in South Africa to serve as a framework for replication in other locations.

The decisions adopted by the UNDP Executive Board in recent years contributed significantly to facilitating the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120. The efforts being made within JCGP, the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions and ACC and at the field level to promote joint programming and common services would help achieve the objectives of the resolution. A significant contribution was being made by the Governments of programme countries to the strengthening of coordination within the United Nations system.

UNDP, along with its partners in UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and other agencies and funds, was determined to implement General Assembly resolution 50/120 as speedily as possible. The Council could assist by giving precise indications of the progress expected in the context of the recommendations made in the report of the Secretary-General. In particular, guidance would be welcome with respect to: the programme approach; the strengthening of national capacities; the harmonization and simplification of policies and procedures; common services; joint premises; and cooperation among the various partners in follow-up and evaluation.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) said that various difficulties remained in implementing the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120. Little progress had been made in the past year with regard to further simplification and harmonization of regulations and procedures, and compromises were required from funds and programmes, national Governments and bilateral donors alike. Progress in harmonizing programming cycles was more encouraging, however, with the prospect of more than 90 per cent of countries having harmonized their programming by the following cycle. The budget harmonizations undertaken by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had been particularly effective, resulting in a common approach that would allow greater transparency of budget format.

Where evaluation was concerned, the proposed plans should be implemented and rigorously monitored. The approach outlined for evaluating the impact of the United Nations system's operational development activities was of especial interest, as such evaluations required databases at the planning stage, progress indicators, adequate time intervals between completion and evaluation, and linkages to the strategic plans of institutions and Governments. In addition, the scope and level of the evaluation must be clearly defined. Moreover, care had to be exercised to ensure the objectivity of mid-term reviews and annual reports.

Performance in the area of common services and premises had been rather poor, with United Nations agencies under the same roof in only 14 per cent of countries. In that regard, the proposals of the Joint Inspection Unit in document A/49/629 merited close attention.

Although much work had been done with regard to country strategy notes (CSNs) over the previous three years, relatively few concrete results had been obtained. Her delegation called upon resident coordinators in the field to continue to promote CSNs as a tool for more effective planning, integration and coordination of field activities.

The positive example of the programme undertaken by the Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) should lead to other initiatives to strengthen field coordination, although the role of resident coordinators apparently required further study and clarification.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that, while his delegation was encouraged that the basis for implementing General Assembly resolution 50/120 appeared more solid than that in the case of the predecessor resolution, comprehensive statistical data on operational activities reflected a frustratingly marginal increase in the resources being made available for development.

For effective national execution, national capacity needed to be enhanced. The system of accountability should be broadened, simplified and brought into line with the national system. Projects should make maximum use of local institutions, services and expertise, and authority should be delegated to the field level where possible. Governments should retain access to, as well as provide as necessary, guidance on programmes and funds. The programme approach should be implemented with a flexibility that reflected the diversity of countries' development needs.

If desired, country strategy notes (CSNs) should be prepared by the respective countries with the full participation and leadership of their Governments; the resident coordinator's office should only facilitate the process, without imposing conditions for the development of the cooperative framework. The CSNs should be a complementary tool for the overall programming and implementation of development activities undertaken by Governments, with or without the assistance of development partners.

Given the country-specific priorities of programme administration and execution and the differing mandates of United Nations programmes, attempts at harmonization would be impractical in the absence of an integrated cooperation framework for the entire United Nations system. Harmonization of programming cycles at the initiative of the national authority appeared to be a more

feasible goal. The United Nations system should limit its harmonization efforts to issues of broad and common concern. Moreover, a common spirit of sharing and caring among the organizations of the United Nations system would be more conducive to effective programme coordination and implementation than would common premises and services in and of themselves.

Finally, he emphasized the importance of full participation by the national authority in programme monitoring and evaluation and the need for a formal framework to facilitate consultation among Member States and the organizations of the United Nations system.

Mr. SOEPRAPTO (Indonesia) said that the simplification and harmonization of rules and procedures continued to be hampered by the sheer number of funds and programmes involved; the varying circumstances and stages of development of recipient countries compounded the problem. In initiating general harmonization guidelines to meet those constraints, the United Nations system should take full account of the priorities expressed in the strategy notes of those countries electing to use them. Overall management requirements should be simplified so as not to divert the focus of national institutions from more essential matters.

His delegation was pleased to note the progress already made towards achieving the goal of a more coordinated country presence, including common premises, and commended efforts to provide guidelines on operating a common services account. It also called for the strengthening of national capacities, with a view to improved programme monitoring and evaluation at the field level, and for full account of field-level feedback to be taken in the Headquarters-level strategic plan.

Ms. KRISHNA (India) stressed the need to preserve the specificity of individual funds and programmes and their supporting constituencies. Greater coordination between various parts of the United Nations system should not come at the cost of the neutrality of United Nations development assistance, nor should it entail the imposition of conditionalities.

She stressed the need to evolve concrete measures to ensure adequate funding for operational activities and to provide countries with diverse resource options. Overall aid coordination should be undertaken by Governments alone, while programme impact evaluations should be conducted in the overall context of long-term poverty eradication goals. The country strategy note

should be an optional tool, not a requirement for formulating general policy guidelines.

Mr. PRENDERGAST (Jamaica) said that while the resident coordinator system would be the essential agent of change in the management process, collaboration with Governments would be a crucial element to ensure the success of that process. Monitoring and feedback mechanisms and operational guidelines should be developed through a collaborative effort.

His delegation would like to learn more about the specific areas of difficulty that had been encountered thus far in the process of simplification and harmonization. The sharing of common premises should be pursued, except in specific cases where premises could not meet all operational requirements. The long-term effectiveness of programmes depended on predictable, continuous and assured funding. New and innovative ideas for generating funds should be viewed as an addition to, not a replacement for, existing funding and resource-allocation mechanisms.

Mr. BETI (Observer for Switzerland) said that, while harmonization of programme cycles had been accomplished in many countries, a common methodology for assessment, project description and reporting and similar monitoring and evaluation systems had proved more difficult to develop. His delegation proposed that the Council should request that the United Nations funds and programmes intensify their harmonization efforts and report to it in 1997 on the progress accomplished. It hoped that the system-wide application of the programme approach would result in an increased number of jointly financed operations and better outputs.

While his delegation agreed that the Secretariat would need additional resources in order to carry out the work outlined in resolution 50/120, it suggested that the Secretariat should convene an informal meeting to discuss in detail the priorities, content and timing of the different reviews, as well as actual funding requirements. It hoped that some of the resources could be mobilized within the United Nations system as in the past.

Mr. ACUÑA (Costa Rica), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the operational activities of the United Nations development system should not be allowed to usurp the monitoring and aid-coordination functions of Governments. Although the Group of 77 and China supported the concept of shared premises and facilities, it reiterated the need to preserve

the specificity of individual funds and programmes and their supporting constituencies. Moreover, the United Nations system should maintain its neutral character and should not resort to conditionalities.

Governments that did not resort to country strategy notes should be allowed to use their own programmes and plans as development frameworks, and downstream project implementation should not be ignored in favour of the programme approach. Moreover, it was important not to lose sight of the international enabling environment, especially with regard to the problems of resources and technology transfers.

Mr. KYUN (Observer for the Republic of Korea) endorsed the statement made by the preceding speaker and said that the key question was whether resolution 50/120 could be fully implemented. He believed that national execution would be further facilitated by the simplification of the rules and procedures governing programme management and reporting requirements which, if too diverse, constituted a serious obstacle to effective collaboration and evaluation. Undue government effort was spent trying to fathom complex requirements and procedures, creating an additional burden, especially for countries involved in reconstruction and rehabilitation. In that regard, his delegation urged the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and the Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) to endeavour to complete the task of information gathering and assessment and the field testing by the end of the current year.

United Nations organizations at the country level should ensure that periodic programme reviews and evaluations were conducted in a timely and coordinated manner. His delegation therefore endorsed the holding of joint evaluations by various organizations on specific themes. The United nations system should promote the development of national evaluation capacities. Common guidelines for monitoring and evaluation programmes and mechanisms for collecting the baseline and performance data were also essential.

Closer cooperation at headquarters was vital to achieving a new spirit of partnership within the United Nations system. His delegation commended the recent decision of the Secretary-General to designate the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme as the Special Coordinator for Economic and Social Development. At the field level, a more integrated approach within the framework of national policies should be developed under the leadership of the

resident coordinator. His delegation welcomed the increased number of single United Nations system premises as a development which improved efficiency and coordination.

The ultimate objective of all improvements to operational activities was to enhance national capacity-building. As a small but important step in that direction, his delegation proposed that the number of national experts and the proportion of indigenous technology used in operational activities should be increased.

Mr. HAEMMERLI (Division for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD)), replying to a question put by the representative of Ireland, on behalf of the European Union, said that the demands of translating legislation into operational guidelines had to be balanced against the need for flexibility at the field level. When approaching the problem of rules and procedures, it was necessary to take related costs for recipient countries into account. In the past, heavy emphasis had been placed on detailed operational guidelines, often devised at headquarters with insufficient consultation of field and national personnel. The new approach was to first decide which measures had been successful, and then to offer a broad array of options from which the most appropriate could be chosen by those in the field. Depending on resources, it was hoped that national officials, United Nations system personnel and members of diplomatic missions would be consulted with a view to avoiding some of the problems of the past.

The programme approach was merely a tool designed to facilitate the management of external resources by national authorities, which should be fully conversant with the guidelines in order to ensure that its country's particular requirements were met. Training programmes and workshops offered to national officials should be improved to enhance common understanding. Some organizations had a lengthy experience with the programme approach, while others had only recently begun to use that approach. At the United Nations system level, DPCSD had reported to the Economic and Social Council in 1993 and 1994 on actions taken by the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ) and on some common principles relating to the programme approach. In keeping with resolution 50/120, DPCSD would review the common-system definitions of the programme approach and how to translate them at the country level. Finally, with regard to the use of Joint Inspection Unit (JIU)

outputs, JIU reports were carefully reviewed by individual organizations, ACC and CCPOQ. Reports and observations regarding actions undertaken were also submitted to the General Assembly and considered by the Fifth Committee. The Joint Inspection Unit had devoted much of its time to operational activities and provided many recommendations to various organizations.

Replying to the representative of the Philippines, he said that it would have been more accurate to refer to "governmental and intergovernmental levels" in the second sentence of annex II, section E, of document E/1996/64. In the last line of the same section, reference should have been made to reforms in the three interrelated areas of governance, resource negotiation and increased efficiency and effectiveness of all operational activities, instead of merely to reforms in governance.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.26
5 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 26th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 9 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

Informal dialogue with country teams

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96-80902 (E)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

Informal dialogue with country teams

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme), speaking as United Nations Resident Coordinator in Egypt, said that the United Nations system as a whole had moved towards a more cohesive role for the Resident Coordinator system, adopting Sustainable Human Development as its paradigm, and collaborative programming as its modus operandi. To that end, the country team, which represented a large number of agencies and staff, had worked with other multilateral and bilateral donors to form a donor assistance group to enhance development cooperation and dialogue.

With regard to harmonization in programming matters, the country team had worked with the entire development community on thematic programmes aimed at helping the Egyptian Government mitigate the impact of structural adjustment and reform. In addition to area-based programmes, the country team had also cooperated on issues-based programmes such as the Government's drive for basic education reform and the elaboration of information systems for development. The nine United Nations agencies in Egypt had also established a permanent team for disaster management and had applied the lead agency principle to coordination of programmes in the follow-up to the major international conferences.

With regard to coordination mechanisms and harmonization of procedures, the team had established systems for the sharing of development experiences with representatives from all sectors of the donor community, World Bank and international organizations. Development of Egypt's first country strategy note (CSN) would be preceded by an area-based initiative in the Sinai which would serve as a pilot case.

With regard to the common country assessment, the Egypt human development report, which was produced by the Institute of National Planning with UNDP support, was to be further upgraded in order to produce the data/indicators required for the implementation of that assessment. The Government was also reviewing its resourcing priorities in the light of the 20/20 Concept, which was being used as a measuring stick to gauge the support of the donor community for social development and basic needs.

Within the United Nations system, a three-level framework had been developed to ensure streamlining of roles and activities at the macro, meso and micro levels. At the same time, an inter-agency programme/project appraisal committee was being established to strengthen cooperation and avoid duplication of effort. At the national level, the Operational Unit for Development Assistance continued to offer invaluable support for programme implementation, while non-governmental organizations were being strengthened in order to enhance the targeting of their work at the grass-roots level.

In terms of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, the human development report for Egypt had proved a useful operational tool, which had been taken up by the 26 Governors of Egypt as an instrument to monitor the effectiveness of their actions and of the work of the United Nations system. The report had also fostered healthy competition between Governors, helping to encourage efforts towards performance improvements and to direct the interventions required of Government and the United Nations agencies.

A number of initiatives had been proposed to help create and project a unified profile for the United Nations in Egypt, through the creation of a home page on the Internet, the establishment of a unified United Nations reference library and the development of a unified media strategy.

In order to enhance harmonization in operational and administrative matters, the country team was investigating opportunities for shared and common services, including electronic and travel services, as well as security systems. The search for common premises continued, although its resolution also depended on changes being made in the host country agreement, preferably through the establishment of a common agreement to cover all agencies.

Putting all those efforts into some perspective, the case of Sinai might serve as a testing ground to show that the United Nations could cooperate effectively to promote sustainable development in a politically relevant area.

Having suffered from underdevelopment for years, Sinai had been chosen by the Government for a development and revitalization programme under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture. The United Nations, which had been charged with a range of tasks involving the development of infrastructure, vocational training and employment, viewed the Sinai challenge as an opportunity to collaborate on focused development.

Mr. KAMANDO (United Republic of Tanzania) said that, although paragraph 24 of the report of the Secretary-General (E/1996/64) had referred to the diversity of rules and procedures as an obstacle to coordination in the field, the resident coordinator had not mentioned that as a difficulty. He would like to hear more about how the diversity of rules and procedures affected national institutions managing externally funded programmes.

Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) asked what role the Government played in coordinating the many United Nations agencies represented in Egypt, and what channels were used by United Nations agencies for programme delivery.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that, although things appeared to be working well in Egypt, she wondered if any problems had been encountered that might have resulted from decisions taken at Headquarters.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) asked what major obstacles and difficulties had been encountered in coordinating multilateral and bilateral aid, and whether those agencies met on a regular basis in order to strengthen their cooperation. She would also like to learn more about the workings of cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations in Egypt.

Ms. REMMELZWAAL (Netherlands) said that specific examples of cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations in the field would be welcome, along with suggestions for improvement. She would like to hear more about the country programme procedure, since UNICEF placed a great deal of emphasis on programme preparation in the country itself.

Mr. RAZA (Pakistan), noting that in paragraph 40 of its resolution 50/120 the General Assembly had decided that resident coordinators should be informed of planned programme activities, inquired whether they were actually being so informed by the other agencies of the system. He also wondered whether it would be feasible to use national accounting procedures as one way of harmonizing rules and procedures. He invited comment on any areas where UNDP was not satisfied with the support, information, and project approval processing

it was receiving from Headquarters. Finally, UNICEF was taking a rights-based approach to programme planning, and he would like to learn more about that approach on an operational level.

Mr. ABDELLATIF (Egypt), noting that there had been much criticism of cooperation in that area, asked about the role UNDP had played in the coordination of technical assistance in Egypt. It would also be helpful if the resident coordinator could shed some light on cooperation between the Bretton Woods institutions and United Nations agencies in the area of structural adjustment policies.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) said that, in such areas as poverty alleviation, policy would have to be set on a country-wide basis. Because UNDP did not have significant financial resources to contribute, he wondered whether it could play a role at the macroeconomic policy level, or whether it confined itself to providing a technical assistance or intellectual input.

Mr. AVAKOV (Russian Federation) asked what role the Government of Egypt played in the inter-agency project evaluation mechanism and whether a format already existed for proposals for technical assistance that included investment.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the representative of Tanzania, said that the lack of harmonization of rules and procedures was indeed one of the most serious impediments to coordination at the country level. It was his hope that the unified procedures adopted by UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA would be extended to all agencies in the field. The Government of Egypt played a central role in every exercise and promoted every initiative. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs dealt mainly with the United Nations and its agencies, while the Ministry of International Cooperation dealt with the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors, and the two ministries coordinated their activities before approaching the international institutions. The planning and evaluation mechanisms and even the production of the human development report had been country-driven.

Problems were certainly encountered in project execution in the field, and perhaps the greatest difficulties arose because of the sense that the resident coordinator system lacked a strong mandate. While the United Nations contributed only 1 to 1.5 per cent of the total of international assistance to

Egypt, it had a vital role in providing services. UNDP had been able to break through administrative bottlenecks and provide management for several projects funded by the Bretton Woods institutions. Two such examples were civil service reform, where it had cooperated with the Governments of Egypt and Canada, and the reform of the capital and security market, which was not ready to cope with the transition to a market economy. The United Nations agencies had a role to play because problems could not always be addressed at the macroeconomic level.

In reply to the representative of Pakistan, although other agencies were not strictly required to inform the resident coordinator of their activities, they generally did so because it was impossible to operate otherwise. Procedures for the transfer of projects to national execution varied considerably and there was room for improvement in that area.

A number of delegations had asked how Headquarters could help the resident coordinators and other representatives in the field: the key issue was strategic decentralization. The United Nations was most effective at the country level and operated best as a network. It was time for talk of decentralization to be translated into action at the field level.

Mr. SELMER (World Food Programme (WFP)) cited as an example of cooperation between the World Bank and the World Food Programme a project undertaken in the north-western desert areas of Egypt to assist Bedouin families to improve their agricultural practices and collect rainwater, with the overall goal of improving household food security. The evaluation had revealed that the project remained limited to the coastal areas where conditions were less harsh, and thus was not achieving its objective of reaching the poorest of the poor. WFP needed cash for tools and to employ skilled labour to work under the most difficult conditions. The World Bank had cash available, but only enough to cover 40 per cent of the overall project requirement. The World Bank and WFP had therefore entered into a co-financing agreement whereby WFP provided food for the workers and the World Bank provided the cash to hire skilled labour and buy tools. The Government of Egypt and the farmers were also partners in the project.

Mr. NAMAZI (UNICEF) said that at the field level UNICEF was moving away from service delivery to advocacy for rights. The "rights approach" to programme development had been devised to encourage ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. First, a situation analysis of the

enjoyment of such rights as health, education and survival would be conducted, which would be linked with the goals of the World Summit for Children. Those analyses provided a broad perspective that could be used to draw the Government's attention to serious areas of neglect, to establish a link between the Convention and legislative measures and to bring government departments together.

As to the problems encountered, he agreed that delegation of decision-making authority to the field was of the utmost importance.

Mr. KANCHI (UNFPA) said that because it had been held in Cairo, the International Conference on Population and Development had generated a great deal of interest in population issues at the higher levels of Government. At the lower levels, however, the commitment appeared to be weaker.

The decentralization of authority had not been followed by strengthening of field offices, in terms of human resources and skills.

The United Nations agencies took a strong supportive role in the management of population programmes financed by the Bretton Woods institutions and by a number of bilateral donors. A programme appraisal mechanism, encompassing such agencies as UNICEF, WHO, and non-governmental and grass-roots organizations, was fully operational.

Dr. AL-KHAWASHKY (World Health Organization (WHO)) stressed that especially at the country level, coordination and planning should take place between the various agencies before they committed themselves to a project. The World Bank was assisting the Egyptian Government in health sector reform, but had made no effort to seek the advice of WHO. The latter had approached the Bank on its own initiative to offer information on the current status of the health sector.

Mr. SHIHAB-ELDIN (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) said that one problem that must be addressed was the multiplicity of national counterpart agencies with which the specialized agencies were required to deal at the operational level. Another was the administrative and other non-technical issues which technical staff had to deal with in the field. Finally, training programmes must be expanded, particularly in the managerial and technical fields, so that mission staff could keep abreast of the rapid changes that were taking place in their respective subject areas.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked whether decisions adopted at Headquarters, such as General Assembly resolution 50/120, were transmitted to the field accompanied by clear guidelines for their implementation. He noted that UNDP proposed to earmark 1.8 per cent of its resources to the strengthening of the resident coordinator system. It would be useful to know what concrete actions were envisaged to achieve that objective. Given that the resident coordinator system relied on the goodwill of all concerned, it would be helpful to know how much the need for good working relationships between the resident coordinator and the various heads of mission was taken into account when making the appointment.

With regard to the management reforms currently under way in UNICEF, it would be interesting to know whether that exercise included the strengthening of cooperation with other agencies and whether the proposed reforms had been discussed with sister agencies. It would also be useful to know whether the various agencies circulated their mission statements to each other.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme), replying to the question of whether decisions taken at headquarters were accompanied by guidelines for their implementation at the field level, said that at times they were transmitted without comment, at other times they were filtered down through the executive boards of the agencies concerned and at times they were accompanied by specific rules and guidelines.

On the question of the funds available in UNDP country offices, decisions on the use of such funds must be taken in consultation with the Government concerned. Indeed, it was not even possible to respond to proposals for project funding without first consulting the Government.

As for the evaluation of the performance of resident coordinators, while his own performance as UNDP Resident Representative in Egypt was evaluated by the Programme, his performance as United Nations Resident Coordinator was not subject to evaluation, even though he spent 30 to 35 per cent of his time performing the latter functions.

Mr. SELMER (World Food Programme) said that decisions adopted at headquarters were sometimes forwarded to the field accompanied by covering memoranda requesting that specific action should be taken. Field offices were sometimes also requested to report on the status of implementation of decisions. Rules therefore did exist for the follow-up of decisions at the country level.

The World Food Programme was committed to the strengthening of the regional coordinator system, which still suffered from a number of deficiencies. To that end, the Executive Director had recently written to the heads of country offices requesting their views on the problems and shortcomings of the system. The replies were being analysed at headquarters and a report would be submitted to the Administrator of UNDP.

Mr. KANCHI (United Nations Population Fund) said that UNFPA headquarters relied on inputs from the field to formulate guidelines for the implementation of decisions at the country level, in collaboration with other specialized agencies. On the question of training, the International Centre for Advanced Technical and Vocational Training (ICAT) in Turin already provided some training in the field of coordination, although much more could be done in that area.

Mr. NAMAZI (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF received guidelines for the implementation of resolutions at the country level and was committed to the resident coordinator system. What was needed, however, was more space for creativity and decision-making at the field level and a change in the current headquarters-oriented management structure. Significant savings could be realized in expenditures on premises, for example, if missions had the authority to make decisions locally.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that it was far from clear how United Nations activities in such fields as poverty eradication and integrated rural development could be harmonized at the operational level in the absence of an appropriate mechanism for coordination and division of responsibilities. The objective of harmonization was to avoid duplication and to help Governments in their preparation of target-oriented programmes. He wondered if enough was being done to consult with Governments and to encourage their participation in that process. It was time to move beyond discussions and to involve the private sector, civil society, non-governmental organizations and Governments in the coordination efforts.

He pointed out that country strategy notes were merely a reflection of a country's perspective on development and could in no way be considered as a solution to its development problems. Nevertheless, the United Nations system should help to strengthen the capacity of Governments to play a more active role in the preparation of the notes.

With regard to the role of United Nations resident coordinators, he wondered whether coordinators enjoyed the authority and appropriate environment to effectively assist Governments in achieving the policy objectives of the various agencies of the United Nations system.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme) said that efforts had been made to harmonize programme execution whenever feasible, but much of the responsibility for doing so lay with the host Government. It was true that the resident coordinator system involved a great deal of discussion, but it was equally the case that a decision had been made to progress once and for all from talk to action. The country strategy note was by no means an indispensable instrument; the most important thing was to receive a clear message from the host Government about what it expected from the United Nations system. Sometimes Governments would elaborate development plans that were so broad in scope that individual agencies had ample opportunity to pick and choose the areas in which they wanted to become involved. Such an approach tended to militate against harmonization and coordination. Governments should issue clear guidelines about what they wanted and when they wanted it done.

Regarding the mechanism for implementing operational activities, a Government would normally appoint an official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to canvass the opinions of other ministries and define what the country expected from the United Nations system. The plan was then transmitted to the United Nations system for discussion with a view to implementation.

It was impossible to state categorically whether the resident coordinator system was actually working, but he believed that success could only be achieved if the host Government showed support for the entire process. The local authorities had to provide a lead, otherwise the efforts of development partners would flounder.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) noted that the decline in the level of resources seemed to be due, in part, to donor fatigue on the part of taxpayers in donor nations and asked what the representatives of the Funds and Programmes proposed to do in order to rekindle enthusiasm for United Nations-sponsored projects.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme) said that lack of resources was not a problem in all countries; indeed, in Egypt funding was not a contentious issue, since resource mobilization strategies at the country level

had been very successful. The Funds and Programmes had no means of influencing public perception in donor countries of development activities. The development programmes themselves had to stand or fall on their own merits.

Mrs. KABA CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire), noting that many development programmes were funded by a combination of regular budget funds topped up by voluntary contributions, said that since the flow of voluntary contributions was often erratic, it sometimes happened that programmes could not be fully implemented. The resident coordinator should indicate whether programmes were budgeted for solely on the basis of guaranteed incoming funds.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme) said that the strategic approach was to implement only those development activities for which resources had been guaranteed.

Mr. NAMAZI (United Nations Children's Fund) said that Funds and Programmes involved in development activities must be realistic, but at the same time resources from bilateral donors had always been forthcoming for well-organized and worthwhile projects. However, the resident coordinator must work within the resource ceiling mandated by the Executive Board. Domestic resources mobilized by Governments and local communities also played a tremendously important role.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said that by pursuing the goals of harmonization and collaboration, United Nations Funds and Programmes could actually act as a catalyst in persuading Governments to mobilize resources for development.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme) said that resource mobilization at the country level was more successful when the host Government had to deal with the United Nations system as a whole rather than as a collection of individual agencies. A united front on the part of United Nations Funds and Programmes elicited a united response and eliminated competition for scarce resources. It should also be borne in mind that the United Nations effort in the field of development assistance was not simply addressed to the host Government; it was also aimed at local donors, local communities and non-governmental organizations, thus creating the broadest possible forum for discussion and involvement.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) said that his delegation wished to know more about the proposal to make use of common premises mentioned by the representative of the United Nations Children's Fund.

Mr. NAMAZI (United Nations Children's Fund) said that the advantages of common premises were many, for example making possible the establishment of a common information centre. The underlying aim was to devolve more decision-making authority to country teams at the field level.

Mr. MUZIO (United Nations Development Programme), replying to a question from Ms. KABA CAMARA (Côte d'Ivoire), said that almost all of the experts employed in development activities in Egypt were Egyptian. Foreign expatriates were hardly ever used.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

PROVISIONAL

E/1996/SR.27
6 August 1996

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Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 27th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 9 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

Informal dialogue with country teams (continued)

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96-80905 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

Informal dialogue with country teams (continued)

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)), speaking as United Nations Resident Coordinator in Malawi, said that he would address matters relating to coordination and governance in that country.

In the context of growing internal dissent, in May 1992 the Malawi consultative group had suspended non-humanitarian aid to Malawi because of human rights abuses. In October 1992 the Government had requested United Nations support for a national referendum. From that time, until the successful completion of the first multi-party elections in May 1994, the United Nations had played a key role in supporting the peaceful transition to a multi-party democracy. During that period UNDP had managed projects, funded by multiple donors, supporting the referendum, the elections and constitutional reform.

He continued to chair regular donor meetings to provide a forum for coordinated support for the consolidation of democracy and human rights and to explore the links between development and governance. A donor subcommittee met weekly to deal with technical and programming aspects of coordinating assistance to governance.

The Government had established an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Human Rights and Democracy following the signature in August 1994 of an agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on a programme to realize the long-term benefits of the recent political changes. A country officer had been in place since 1995 to support the Government, civil society and the United Nations team on those important issues. Many specialized agencies of the United Nations system interacted with the new Parliament and civil society organizations on a wide range of issues.

Malawi faced serious constraints in implementing its ambitious programme of reform, including financial limits in a period of severe structural adjustment and limited technical and managerial capacities. Fortunately, the country had

been able to reattract most of the donor countries which had withdrawn assistance in 1992.

Malawi's experience over the past four years was viewed by many as an ideal, if not unique, example of government and donor coordination. Concerns as to how to improve coordination were being addressed through the implementation of the results of a recent donor retreat - at which the Government also had been represented - on improving development cooperation. Despite serious constraints, the Government increasingly was taking the lead in mobilizing donor support for its policies and programmes.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that, although Malawi was a poor country, it had great potential. The Government had endorsed 14 new policies within the past two years, of which the most important was the decision to devote priority to poverty alleviation. All the policies were supported by organizations of the United Nations system.

In June 1994, free and universal primary education had been established. Enrolment had immediately increased from 1.9 to 3.2 million children. The United Nations family of organizations and bilateral donors had worked closely with the Government to establish an education investment plan.

The Government had also adopted a new health policy, which focused on basic services, primary health care and community empowerment. The United Nations family continued to attach high priority to breast-feeding, nutrition interventions and micronutrients.

Since only one third of the population had access to safe drinking water and only 6 per cent to improved sanitation, the Government had instituted a water and sanitation policy focusing on community-based water management, with equal attention to sanitation, hygiene and appropriate technologies. The United Nations supported those efforts and collaborated closely with many non-governmental organizations.

Another key policy focused on youth, particularly those below the age of 15. Their situation was critical because the education system currently lost 50 per cent of students before they attained permanent literacy. The United Nations family had organized a national volunteer programme with university graduates serving as domestic volunteers, with a view to encouraging behavioural change in young people.

For Malawi to develop, leadership must come from within, and the United Nations had worked to build new partnerships to encourage national ownership of the development process. A new non-governmental organization policy was promoting greater collaboration among donors and the Government.

Ms. LARSEN (World Food Programme (WFP)) said that many of Malawi's poorest households, especially those headed by women, began to run out of food three months after the harvest period. Poor households used three basic strategies to acquire food: directly through household production, which accounted for 25 per cent of food needs; through participation in income-generating activities, which accounted for approximately 45 per cent; and through resort to various coping strategies, accounting for about 30 per cent. Specific strategies were used at different times of the year and efforts were under way to develop annual survival calendars for all 154 extension planning areas in the country.

The United Nations family of organizations and the World Bank were collaborating on the development of new vulnerability analysis and monitoring systems to establish a common geographical basis for development and relief programming and targeting in the food security sector.

A number of new policy initiatives and programmes in the sector provided common ground for enhanced coordination and collaborative programming among the United Nations agencies. Key areas included: the poverty alleviation policy framework; food security programmes; the agriculture and livestock 10-year plan; national nutrition policy; income-generating and employment support programmes; and disaster management and preparedness. United Nations theme groups on food security and disaster management brought together representatives from UNDP, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund and WFP. Agricultural diversification and support for natural resource management were two areas of collaboration.

In the transition from relief to development, the new United Nations approach to food aid focused on the use of targeted food-for-work programmes and a new emphasis on micronutrient deficiencies. Great emphasis also was placed on using food aid to promote improved nutritional practices for women and early childhood education.

Mr. MUBIALA (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that gender issues had increasingly gained importance in the design and implementation of

development programmes in Malawi. The elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, whose status currently was lower than that of men in all respects, was a key element of the Government's poverty alleviation policy framework. More than 20 non-governmental organizations dealt with gender concerns in the country.

All the United Nations agencies and the World Bank were represented on the United Nations theme group on gender, which a consultant currently was assisting to formulate a common United Nations gender policy. He described relevant programmes supported by UNFPA, WFP, UNDP and UNICEF. The programmes were coordinated in other areas, including reproductive health and support for women's legal rights. The Centre for Human Rights was assisting with building capacity to enable the Government to comply with its reporting responsibilities under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Gender concerns could be addressed more effectively once the common United Nations gender policy and plan of action were in place, once those agencies which currently faced staffing constraints could participate more fully in inter-agency activities and once more women held key positions in Government, particularly at the policy-making level.

Dr. CHUWA (World Health Organization (WHO)) cited statistics indicating how hard Malawi had been hit by the AIDS epidemic and underscored the personal, social and economic impact of the epidemic. Among the key policies and strategies established by the Government to cope with the epidemic were the following: a population policy which promoted condom use and the integration of education on AIDS and reproductive health; the participation of youth in AIDS prevention activities; the introduction of policy guidelines which encouraged the care of orphans in the extended family and the community; the promotion of home-based care and counselling and the encouragement of support groups to participate in those activities; the promotion of blood safety; and the assignment of high priority to the treatment of sexually transmitted diseases.

A thematic group on HIV/AIDS had been established to coordinate the work of the United Nations family of organizations under the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Total United Nations system funding to combat AIDS in Malawi for the current year was approximately $2 million. In the coming months, coordination efforts would focus on the promotion of an integrated

expanded response to the epidemic, the promotion of international best practices, joint funding and a joint evaluation of the national programme.

A critical issue was how to ensure that the 50 per cent of the population of Malawi currently free of HIV (children ages 5 to 15) remained free of the virus. Intervention was needed to promote sustained risk-free behaviours starting at a very early age. Malawi also recognized the importance of facilitating the treatment of opportunistic conditions in AIDS patients and of helping them to die with dignity. The provision of drugs to manage and treat sexually transmitted diseases was crucial to the control of the epidemic. Malawi also needed to strengthen the response to the epidemic within a development framework analysis that recognized the importance of addressing gender inequality and promoting community empowerment and sustainable human development. Additional funds to combat the epidemic were needed. Lastly, the specialized agencies must work out arrangements for funding administrative support for the country programme adviser, and efforts must be made to ensure that UNAIDS activities formed a truly integrated United Nations programme.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that team-building experience gained by the agencies and subsequent agreement on specific work plans had aided their coordination efforts. A United Nations country coordination committee had already reviewed in detail new programmes prepared by UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP. The programmes proposed by UNDP, the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the International Labour Organization would be reviewed in September. The agencies had also been meeting as a group with representatives of the Malawi Government to ensure greater cohesiveness with respect to policy-making and operational activities.

The theme groups were supervised by the heads of agencies; the most active were those concerned with AIDS, gender, food security and nutrition, and disaster management. New groups had been established to deal with water, poverty, governance and youth. More work was needed in public information activities, however. Overall donor coordination in Malawi was extensive, with some 12 active sectoral or thematic groupings besides the United Nations theme groups.

The mid-term evaluation of the UNFPA and UNICEF country programmes had been carried out in December 1994, with the involvement of other agencies, and the UNDP mid-term evaluation had been completed in February 1994. In 1996 a common

evaluation would be undertaken of the UNAIDS programme as a basis for more effective joint programming in the future.

The following areas had been identified for joint programming: poverty monitoring and analysis; UNAIDS; gender; food security and nutrition; district and community development; and youth. Two other areas of common interest were building partnerships with civil society and increasing the use of national human and technological resources.

The Government had initiated work on the country strategy note in 1995. With United Nations support, it would be organizing a national social summit at which the draft country strategy note would be reviewed in the context of national action plans for follow-up to major United Nations conferences. Studies were being initiated on the impact on Malawi of implementing the 20/20 compact and on the relationship of existing and projected development programmes with the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. The United Nations team had offered to help pilot the common country assessment that was being developed by the Joint Consultative Group on Policies (JCGP) and believed that it was vital to strengthen national capacity for that purpose.

The evaluation of the UNDP country programme had shown positive achievements, notably in establishing a financial monitoring and reporting system. Consultations had been held with other United Nations agencies to determine how that system might support them. A UNDCF-financed and UNDP-supported district development fund would help ensure that funds were available for communities.

For various reasons, cooperation with the World Bank had not been extensive in the period 1992-1994; from 1995, more extensive cooperation had developed through consultative group meetings, participation of World Bank staff in theme group activities, and joint programming.

The Government had allocated land for common premises in June 1991; it was hoped that construction would start late in 1997. Common services were limited since all six agencies were located in separate buildings. UNDP continued to provide financial and personnel services to the other five agencies and UNAIDS, and consideration was being given to establishing a common support facility in Blantyre. The operations managers met on a regular basis to harmonize procedures and regulations and shared the capacity to conduct system-wide surveys and meet other requirements.

There were a number of priority coordination issues. The lack of full-time staff support was a major constraint, there having been a 50 per cent reduction in UNDP international staff since 1994. Assistance to the Government in aid management was a priority concern. The integration of the World Bank and UNDP programme approaches would be a useful first step in helping the Government build the capacity to develop national programmes on which donors could base decisions for support. More needed to be done to harmonize procedures within the United Nations system. Further guidance on policy and programme harmonization in such areas as gender and poverty would be productive for country-level activities. Consistency in the decentralization of authority to country representatives would also help in terms of system cohesion and programme management and implementation. The exchange of staff through the resident coordinator system was an excellent mechanism for harmonization.

Ms. SIRVE (Finland) asked whether the Malawi country team felt that there was sufficient decentralization in Malawi; how much coordination there was with non-governmental organizations, and what problems arose; what kind of indicators were being used for follow-up to the 20/20 compact and what was being done to involve national authorities in that process; how sustainability was being ensured in the UNICEF immunization campaign; and whether the international staff who had left the Malawi office were being replaced by local staff.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the level of decentralization in UNICEF and UNDP made it easier to respond flexibly to emerging opportunities and needs. UNDP benefited from effective backstopping by specialized agencies, and that decentralization made its work more effective and timely.

There had been a large increase in the number of non-governmental organizations in Malawi because of the changing political situation. A government/non-governmental organization/donor working group was looking at non-governmental organization policy, legislation and codes of conduct. Problems arose because of the very limited capacity of non-governmental organizations and the need to ensure that the support provided did not detract from sustainability, ownership or capacity-building. The issue of balance between central Government, local government, village communities and non-governmental organizations was very important and still had to be worked out.

A study of the 20/20 concept had been started, using a national consultant. The Government of Malawi was preparing an analysis of its progress in implementing the commitments entered into at recent United Nations conferences and was planning to hold a national social summit to review action plans. It had increased the allocation of resources from the national budget to basic social services and, with the assistance of the World Bank, was ensuring that basic services did not suffer as the government budget was reduced.

In addition to the 50 per cent reduction in Professional posts, the Malawi United Nations office had lost two core national officer posts and four General Service posts. Some of the posts would be funded from extrabudgetary resources.

Ms. THUNYANI (Observer for Malawi) asked what the experience of the United Nations system had been in Malawi following the change of Government and what steps were being taken to deal with the growing problems of orphans of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that UNICEF had a fourfold strategy for sustaining its immunization campaign: encouraging increased government funding for vaccines and drugs; education of mothers, especially through the safe motherhood programme, and an enhanced Expanded Programme on Immunization covering micronutrients; involvement of other partners, particularly schoolteachers, members of Parliament, and also herbalists and traditional healers; and use of the radio, increasingly in vernacular languages, to inform parents about the necessity of immunizing their children. In addition, the Governments of Germany, Japan and the United States of America and the World Bank had provided funds for vaccines and drugs.

Mr. ACEMAH (Uganda) said that the problems faced by Malawi were similar to those of other African countries in the subregion, and some of them had regional implications. He asked whether there was a mechanism to achieve coordination at the subregional level and, if so, how effective it was.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the experience of the Malawi country team with the new Government had been very positive. In the area of coordination, the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development was meeting donors on a monthly basis to share information and exchange views. The Malawi country team was trying to systematize the support it provided to members of Parliament, including assistance for their efforts to take development messages to their

constituencies, and helping human rights non-governmental organizations to conduct lobbying in Parliament. The Government was making efforts to establish new human rights institutions and ensure effective civic education, and was formulating a wide range of new policies.

There was some ad hoc subregional coordination; the Government of Malawi had requested the Government of Uganda to provide advice on decentralization. UNICEF, UNDP and WFP had organized many more meetings than in the past among their representatives in Africa and southern Africa. Recently UNDP had organized a meeting of the 15 resident representatives of southern Africa to establish networks on poverty, the environment, communications, AIDS and other topics. With modern communications, very effective networking was possible, and it was being supported by training and coordination workshops. The United Nations was working increasingly with Governments to improve networking in southern Africa.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) asked whether it was true that the Government of Malawi had a poverty eradication programme and, if so, how United Nations programmes were integrated in it.

Ms. LARSEN (World Food Programme) said that the Government of Malawi had a poverty eradication programme and the United Nations had been actively involved in identifying areas in which it could provide assistance. WFP was particularly involved in vulnerability analysis and monitoring systems, along with the United States Agency for International Development.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that the Government of Malawi had approved a poverty alleviation policy framework incorporating its various sectoral and thematic initiatives and had asked each ministry and sector to develop programmes within that framework. It had also set up a technical committee to develop a poverty monitoring system. UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank needed to work together at the global and country levels in supporting poverty monitoring and analysis.

Mr. MURAOKA (Japan) said that coordination between bilateral donors was crucial for the effective performance of the United Nations system's operational activities and requested further clarification on how such coordination was achieved.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that there was a high level of donor coordination in Malawi, which was being complemented by

increasing government involvement, especially in the fields of education, health and agriculture. However, there was a need for a more result-oriented approach to programming on the part of the United Nations system in Malawi and for ways to manage more effectively the many programmes and projects being started there, so as to reduce the burden on the Government.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) asked for further elaboration by the resident coordinator on how harmonization and coordination could be made more productive, how inter-agency complementarity could be enhanced, and how the Government of Malawi could participate in the process. Under the harmonized approach, monitoring and evaluation should be a collaborative effort, so as to ensure the utmost transparency.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that, while effective bilateral and trilateral coordination was taking place in Malawi, it was not always possible for all agencies to collaborate on a single programme. Moreover, it was necessary to consider carefully the needs and capacities of communities when designing incentives and support for their development efforts. UNDP was examining ways to work more effectively with local authorities through the district planning mechanism so that programmes were decentralized but not undertaken in isolation.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked whether it would be possible to organize joint medium-term evaluations in the context of coordinated budget and programming cycles. Secondly, with regard to the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, it would be of interest to know how coordination with the World Bank and other Bretton Woods institutions could be improved. Thirdly, he asked to what extent the resident coordinator was personally affected by the increased workload resulting from the staffing cutbacks and to whom he was accountable. Fourthly, he would appreciate an explanation of the six-year delay in construction of the common premises of the United Nations system in Malawi. Finally, he asked whether staff exchanges were taking place between the various agencies of the United Nations system.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that, where evaluation was concerned, there was a need to confirm the existence of sound government programmes that could be monitored jointly, as for example the district-based programmes and partnerships currently being undertaken. With regard to mid-term reviews, he said that UNDP intended to undertake a joint

mid-term programme review in 1999. Referring to the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, he said that various coordination mechanisms were still being developed and that priorities needed to be established in consultation with the Government of Malawi and the World Bank.

As resident coordinator, he received the bulk of his instructions from the UNDP Administrator, his main relationship was with the UNDP regional bureau, and his primary preoccupation was with UNDP matters. He recognized the need for greater clarity regarding the role, function and reporting responsibilities of the resident coordinators and ways in which the system could continue to evolve. While he attempted to delegate work to the deputy resident coordinator, the overall decrease in staff sometimes resulted in the workload again reverting upwards.

With regard to common premises, he explained that the construction delay had been due to legal obstacles and changes in the local political situation. Finally, on the subject of staff exchanges, he said that UNDP supported the broadening of the pool of staff being drawn on for the resident coordinator position. Very little staff exchange was taking place at other levels, however.

Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden) asked for a further elaboration of ways to achieve better collaboration with the World Bank in the context of African development, including the closer linkage of country strategy notes (CSNs) with the World Bank's policy framework papers (PFPs).

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that relations between the World Bank and UNDP had recently improved. Even though their mandates differed, they could reinforce the effectiveness of each other's programmes. With regard to CSNs and PFPs, he said that previous policy analysis had been driven more by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) than by the Government, which had lacked the capacity to play a greater role. The CSN being the weaker instrument for leveraging resources, there was a need to ensure greater participation and transparency at the country level in the development of the PFP which, moreover, continued to emphasize macroeconomic adjustment.

Ms. GUERREIRO (Portugal) asked what types of collaboration existed in Malawi between the United Nations agencies, the resident coordinator and the Government. She agreed with previous speakers that the United Nations

System-wide Special Initiative on Africa would provide a useful mechanism for better coordination.

Mr. ALOM (Bangladesh) said there was a lack of commitment to the resident coordinator system at the headquarters of United Nations agencies, which should provide more precise guidelines for their field representatives. Since UNDP was the focal point for the resident coordinator system, it should be represented at agency headquarters and should maintain an ongoing dialogue with the agencies.

Mr. JONES (United Nations Development Programme) said that it was important to preserve the different identities of the organizations, especially at the country level, where there was a clear understanding of their individual roles, responsibilities and mandates. Increased focal support from headquarters was needed in areas where the organizations could work together. Over the past year, the commitment by headquarters to the resident coordinator system and the type of information they were providing to their representatives in the field had greatly improved.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund), replying to the Observer for Malawi, said that there were currently 300,000 orphans in Malawi, a number which would increase to 800,000 by the turn of the century. The Government defined an orphan as a child below the age of 15 years without a mother. Over the past year, the United Nations had worked closely and successfully with the Government of Malawi to develop a national policy for orphaned children, the main elements of which were a community-based family care system with income-generating activities for women, safety nets and support mechanisms to help families cope with additional orphans in the household, and preschools to accommodate the two million children in Malawi under the age of 6. In addition to the very positive response by the Malawi Government, churches had played a major role by helping to keep orphans in school.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked for the views of UNICEF on the management excellence programme and those of WHO on the adequacy of the United Nations response to the AIDS epidemic in Malawi.

Ms. HAHN (United Nations Children's Fund) said that the management excellence programme was a process in which all staff members had participated and been heard. The process had led to the development of new guiding principles on commitment and conduct. The overall approach had been to promote

management excellence at the country level by reviewing the career development and training requirements of staff members, improving collaboration with non-governmental organizations and enhancing cooperation with Governments. Because UNICEF received considerable funding from the private sector and international donors, its staff and officers were keenly aware that the credibility and accountability of their organization depended on its ability to ensure that resources were spent wisely. She believed that there should be more inter-agency exchanges involving the management excellence programme.

Mr. CHUWA (World Health Organization), in reply to a question of the representative of France, said that combating AIDS was comparable to fighting a war and that therefore resources were continually needed. The war against AIDS in Malawi had not yet been won. In fact, there was a critical lack of financial resources, equipment and personnel. While the Government in Malawi had welcomed the support of UNAIDS, there continued to be a need for drugs, blood-processing equipment and other forms of humanitarian assistance. He urged the United Nations and other organizations to help step up the fight against the AIDS epidemic in Malawi in the hope that their assistance would alleviate the dangerous situation in that country.

Mr. MUBIALA (United Nations Population Fund) said that UNFPA, which had been operating in Malawi for the past two decades, welcomed the positive support and commitment which it had received since the change of Government in 1994. Since then, the concept of family planning had become much more widely accepted and discussed, a development which had greatly facilitated the work of UNFPA. In another encouraging step, the Parliament had recently adopted a separate budget line for population activities.

In reply to a question put by the representative of Finland regarding decentralization, he said that UNFPA had been experimenting for the past few years in Malawi and several other countries with a system of "decentralized approval authority" whereby country representatives could review projects and make allocations of resources. That new approach had greatly improved the timely implementation of projects, which currently took three months to execute from the moment of formulation rather than six to nine months. In the area of coordination among donors, UNFPA had held consultations with bilateral donors on the formulation of a new cycle of assistance to ensure that UNFPA funding complemented funding by other donors and that family planning programmes reached

all parts of the country. He agreed there should be joint monitoring of programmes and said that UNFPA was working together with WHO to improve the joint monitoring of their programmes.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

E

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PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 28th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 10 July 1996, at 10 a.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.25 a.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(c) CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (E/1996/32, Parts I and II, E/1996/64/Add.1 and 3, E/1996/68, 69, 73 and 74; E/1996/L.19 and DP/1996/11 and 17)

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)) said that UNDP had invested considerable time and money in making the Resident Coordinator system work. It had also put in place a number of training measures and was actively cooperating with other Funds and Programmes. It looked forward to the development of a system in which Funds and Programmes would actually collaborate in country-driven, goal-oriented projects rather than simply sharing information. It had also been encouraged by the progress which had been achieved on common premises, country strategy notes and the harmonization of budget and programming cycles.

Much work remained to be done both at Headquarters and at the country level to fully implement General Assembly resolution 50/120. However, one very positive development had been the establishment of cooperation between UNDP and the Bretton Woods institutions. UNDP had not succumbed to the conditionalities required by those institutions; cooperation simply meant that the two bodies could work together more effectively on initiatives stemming from major United Nations conferences. UNDP's connection with the Bretton Woods institutions had also led to increased cooperation and cohesion at the country level. UNDP would seek to promote progress towards the objectives of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and to maximize cooperation and harmonization. It hoped to address the discrepancy between what was expected of resident coordinators and the lack of resources provided to them.

It was widely recognized that the United Nations had a vital role to play in the wake of emergencies. UNDP was in the forefront of exploring ways to enhance the Organization's response to such circumstances.

Regarding reform, UNDP had made dramatic changes to the way it allocated resources to countries. Poverty eradication had become its overriding mandate and full emphasis had been placed on the link between economic growth and human development. Significant changes had also been made to the Programme's system of accountability and its approach to evaluation. UNDP was pleased that 90 per cent of its core resources were spent in low-income countries, and that one third of its total resources went directly to poverty eradication, the remainder being spent on good governance and strengthening the resource base. Internally, UNDP had charted a new direction for itself and was actively seeking to achieve its self-imposed targets.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that progress had been made on many of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and on coordination of operational activities in general, as witnessed by the productive work of the various inter-agency mechanisms such as the Joint Consultative Group on Policy and the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Inter-agency task forces had been set up to facilitate the coherent and coordinated implementation of the programmes of action of recent international conferences. Other important system-wide initiatives such as the United Nations Special Initiative on Africa had also promoted coordinated action at the country level.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) had participated actively in the various coordination efforts with a view to injecting meaningful change and added value to the various operations of the Funds and Programmes involved. Its report (E/1996/68) outlined some of the perceived benefits and drawbacks of the Resident Coordinator system and the country strategy note. The latter should not become just another bureaucratic requirement but actually add value to the existing development process.

Thus far limited progress had been made in harmonizing programming processes and guidelines, including monitoring and evaluation. Within various inter-agency forums, considerable attention had been devoted to developing a common understanding and action at field level with respect to country strategy

notes, the programme approach, national execution and implementation modalities, and guidelines for the Resident Coordinator system.

The whole issue of national execution needed to be addressed much more carefully, including the question of how to assess whether Governments had sufficient capacity for national execution and how best to develop such capacity in the shortest possible time with the most effective use of limited resources. UNFPA had moved ahead much too quickly without proper preparations and planning, and in so doing the Fund had not used resources as effectively as it could have. Moreover, the matter of capacity building needed to be carefully reviewed. The Fund needed to examine whether it was actually contributing to capacity building or whether it was simply financing the delivery of activities which were sustainable only as long as substantial outside funding was available. Another priority area was coordination of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It was necessary to document the results of UNFPA activities and to analytically identify lessons learned.

In the area of common service and premises, UNFPA had a long tradition of sharing and pooling resources, particularly with UNDP. In most cases, UNFPA shared common premises with UNDP and drew upon a wide array of common administrative, accounting and other services for which UNFPA reimbursed UNDP and the United Nations.

Motivation should always be based on concerns for country-level coordination and the need for more relevant, effective and timely assistance to countries. The number and complexity of guidelines, procedures and processes needed to be further streamlined, simplified and reduced. UNFPA needed to better define how to develop the partnerships it had established with non-governmental organizations and focus on more specific programme collaboration. The importance of ensuring coordination with all partners, including the Bretton Woods institutions and bilateral donors, should be borne in mind. Finally, it was essential for both developing and donor countries to commit resources for development and to honour the agreements reached at recent international conferences.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that as far as the World Food Programme (WFP) was concerned, reform was an ongoing process. The Programme had to respond to emergencies all over the world and therefore required operational flexibility and an effective anticipation and

reaction capacity. To that end, WFP had put in place a number of important reform and revitalization measures connected with governance, operational effectiveness, resourcing, accountability, programme changes and coordination.

WFP had been strengthened institutionally at the beginning of the 1990s with a commensurate increase in its decision-making capability. Since emergency operations accounted for two thirds of its work, the Programme had developed a rapid response capability and an early warning system. In addition, more logistics and emergency relief experts had been recruited, decision-making had been shifted to the field level and greater emphasis had been placed on food purchases and logistics contracts in developing countries.

An effort had been made to boost donors' confidence in how WFP solicited and managed its resource, and in order to ensure greater accountability the Programme's internal audit facility had doubled in size and an office of inspection and investigation had been established. A review of financial accounting and control in field offices had been initiated and a major financial management improvement programme had been put in place, necessitating the recruitment of an increased number of financial officers.

As a result of the adoption of the programme approach, WFP had concentrated its efforts on the world's poorest countries. It had therefore reassessed its operations and had phased out activities in middle-income countries which had the capacity to manage food aid programmes independently. The Programme had actively targeted women since they were the ones directly responsible for food management, and considerable efforts had been made to ensure that food assistance went primarily to them. In addition, WFP had actively tried to recruit more women. Overall, the Programme wished to stress a longer-term strategic vision of its mission envisaging a move towards food security. Internal reforms had attempted to reflect that reorientation.

WFP had signed a number of memorandums of understanding with other United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations, and had adopted many ideas from its development partners. Significant cost savings had been realized in the areas of transport, logistics and documentation, and all of the reforms currently being undertaken by the Programme were being achieved within budget.

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) said that UNICEF had made significant progress in implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120 (1995), particularly with regard to common

premises, the development of country strategy notes and the harmonization of country programming cycles. Implementation could be facilitated in the coming years with the benefit of political support and clear guidelines from the Council.

UNICEF had committed itself to ongoing reform aimed at revitalization of the organization, through its first mission statement, to be produced by the end of 1996, and its management excellence programme. That programme involved representatives from the Executive Board, host countries and staff at all levels. Moreover, staff had produced their own clear set of principles and professional standards, which had been adopted by the management steering committee for use in future performance evaluation.

UNICEF was keenly aware that enhanced coordination was vital to the success of all its operational activities. To that end, it strove to support Governments in their coordination of external cooperation, recognizing that agencies needed to work on their differing mandates with the benefit of access to relevant national bodies.

However, UNICEF's ability to discharge its functions was dependent on access to adequate funds. It had seen no increase in its core resources in 1995 and, in order to help fund country programmes, it had turned to the private sector. Over 30 per cent of UNICEF's contributions from industrialized and developing countries in 1995 had come from the private sector. It would continue to examine in-country funding opportunities as well as maximization of its comparative advantage in order to make best use of existing funds.

UNICEF had issued directives to field officers for the implementation of resolutions at the country level, and had circulated a newsletter outlining United Nations reforms and their impact on UNICEF operations. In terms of personnel, the organization remained committed to training and to the secondment of capable professionals to resident coordinator positions. It hoped that more UNICEF staff, particularly women, would be put forward for those positions, as they continued to be under-represented.

Mr. KAMANDO (United Republic of Tanzania) asked whether the new arrangements for harmonization of country programming cycles, to which the Administrator had referred, would introduce funding conditionalities, preventing countries which had not yet completed their country strategy notes from gaining automatic access to funding. He also asked whether the UNFPA proposal for an

examination of absorptive capacity was intended to deny help to countries which had no capacity for absorption.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) replied that no conditionality attached to the new programming arrangement; the least developed countries would continue to receive around 60 per cent of resources, while regional percentages would remain intact. The new arrangement simply moved away from a strict mathematical equation to a slightly more discretionary system, whereby strong country programmes would be encouraged. UNDP hoped to encourage recipient countries to take its poverty alleviation mandate into account, but did not wish to add to the requirements placed on them by the international donor community.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that the proposal for an absorptive capacity study was intended to help assess, strengthen and develop national programme implementation capacity, while providing agencies with information to help them prioritize their activities. The proposal had received broad support from countries in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere and did not seek to impose new assistance conditionalities.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) asked whether UNDP saw any scope for the harmonization of country strategy notes with the country plans of the Bretton Woods institutions, or whether it saw those programmes as serving different and distinct purposes.

Mr. HAMDAN (Lebanon) said that the Council wanted to know about the difficulties and obstacles which lay in the way of implementing resolution 50/120, and whether the various executive heads had any suggestions as to how to address those difficulties.

Ms. BROWNE (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that since the informal dialogue was important for the Council in its oversight function, the reports which had been presented to it might have contained a little more substance. While the inclusion of information on management processes had been appreciated, more detail should have been provided on issues such as common premises and services. Moreover, it would be helpful if the executive heads would keep the Council informed of progress on a more regular basis throughout the year, so that all groups involved could facilitate better cooperation at the field level. The Council had heard a great deal about the concepts of decentralization of authority, harmonization and simplification of

procedures and the need to accelerate the information flow between headquarters and the field, but had not heard enough about how much was being done to translate those concepts into action.

Mr. CHATAIGNIER (France) wanted to know what resources the agencies had committed for the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120, and whether they felt that the resident coordinator system worked in favour of UNDP in terms of coordinator recruitment. He wondered whether the executive heads felt they were adequately represented in the coordinator system and whether they were satisfied with management of the resident coordinator system at headquarters, and with the location of the support services. They should indicate their views on the possible secondment of some of their personnel to that office, with a view to enhancing coordination. They might further consider whether the management excellence programme should also be applied to the resident coordinator system, involving staff at the field level.

Mr. SABOIA (Brazil) inquired about the role of the Executive Boards in the current reform process, and whether there had been any tendency towards micro-management on their part. With regard to allocation of resources, he would be interested to know what steps had been taken to consider the absorption capacity of countries and to mobilize other resources. Finally, the resident coordinator system could be used to promote opportunities for South-South cooperation, and he inquired about coordination between field offices in that respect.

Mr. FEDORTCHENKO (Russian Federation) said that his delegation would like to learn more about UNFPA mechanisms for regional cooperation, whether such mechanisms existed in all regions and the role of the regional commissions and the resident coordinators in regional coordination. With regard to the response of UNDP and other funds and agencies to crisis situations, he wondered if the early warning system instituted by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was helpful, and how UNDP in particular would address the general development needs of countries after a natural disaster.

Finally, in the Eastern European region and the Commonwealth of Independent States, only eight countries had resident representatives, and he inquired about the potential for participation by United Nations agencies in that region.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme) said that certainly, a stronger relationship was needed between the country documents

prepared by the Bretton Woods institutions and country strategy notes; however, the documents should not be merged as they served different purposes. With regard to the status of the resident coordinator system, since the adoption of General Assembly resolutions 47/199 and 50/120, there had been a dramatic strengthening of the system, both in legislative authority and actual practice and some progress had been made in harmonization and simplification of procedures. He noted, however, that the operational activities system had been given mandates for which no one party was accountable. The advantage was that no action was taken unless all parties were in agreement, but it was difficult to move forward without a clear accountability structure.

The Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA was closely involved in the change management process, which was appropriate at the current stage. The resident coordinator system and United Nations country offices should be used to enhance South-South cooperation, and the role of the Executive Secretaries of the regional economic commissions had been strengthened towards that end. The greatest strength of the regional commissions lay at the intergovernmental and normative level, however.

With regard to the early warning system for natural or man-made disasters, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs information system was excellent, but the Administrative Committee on Coordination would continue to seek ways to improve its functioning. In his view, it was desirable to maintain common leadership in areas undergoing humanitarian emergencies. In Rwanda and Burundi, for example, the humanitarian coordinator also fulfilled the resident coordinator functions. He agreed that there was a desperate need to continue to promote regular development activities in such areas for the long-term benefit of the affected country.

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that in her capacity as Executive Director, she signed any instructions to the field on coordination issues, as a demonstration of the Fund's commitment to enhancing coordination. If the Project Action Committees were to function as intended there must be more active participation. Currently some agencies were represented by very junior staff or were not represented at all.

Absence of common policies and procedures was one of the most important factors limiting the effectiveness of coordination efforts. Some steps had been taken in the Joint Consultative Group on Policies towards a common country

assessment by linking the Country Strategy Note with programme formulation and evaluation. Common guidelines on monitoring and evaluation and thematic evaluations in such areas as health or education would be extremely helpful. A common document and time-frame format would also be desirable. The Executive Board system was an improvement over the former Governing Council, and had led to a more open dialogue.

With regard to South-South cooperation, UNFPA had an active programme funded and promoted by donors. The country support teams held regular meetings with country representatives where the regional commissions were also represented as part of the multi-disciplinary team.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director, World Food Programme) said that approximately 60 out of its 80 field offices shared common premises with UNDP or other agencies and used the same personnel system for hiring local staff. Country directors had limited decision-making authority compared with other agencies, but she hoped for improvement in that area. As for recruitment, three World Food Programme country directors had become resident coordinators since 1991, while nine of its staff had been seconded as humanitarian coordinators to the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WFP had set up a "vulnerability mapping" project to provide early warning of areas where food security problems might arise. In terms of South-South cooperation, WFP purchased over $709 million in goods and services each year, most of which was spent in developing countries. Transferring more management and decision-making authority to the field would enhance those efforts, however.

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund) said that, as a tangible indication of its commitment to the implementation of resolution 50/120 at the field level, UNICEF was an active participant in country teams and in those thematic groups that fell within its mandate. She would like to see more UNICEF staff as resident coordinators, but agreed that the most important consideration was a good match between an individual and the country in question.

With regard to the role of Executive Board, the Management Excellence Programme had thus far been a positive experience, and an excellent dialogue had been established with the Executive Board, which she hoped would continue during the implementation phase. UNICEF participated in South-South cooperation

through contacts between its country offices as well as with other agencies, and also through procurement of goods and services in developing countries.

Ms. ALBRECTSEN (Observer for Denmark) said that she could envision a scenario where a fragmented United Nations system might find itself in a situation in which developing countries demanded services according to their needs and donors supplied development funds through a mixture of altruism and self-interest. Presumably that would lead to erosion of the concept of multilateralism. It would be helpful to hear whether the Executive Heads felt that the Council was focusing on the right area by emphasizing coordination at the country level; perhaps it should focus instead on how the system could present a stronger profile in service delivery. It also seemed that, in transmitting information on decisions and resolutions to the field, the various Funds and Programmes should offer some comments on those decisions.

Mr. AGGREY (Ghana) asked whether the agency which provided the resident coordinator was also responsible for providing the additional resources required for the discharge of the coordinator's responsibilities. He also wondered whether it might not be possible to formulate common guidelines for the implementation at the field level of resolutions and decisions adopted at headquarters. Finally, it would be useful to know what criteria were used for dividing up expenditure on common services and shared premises.

Mr. RAZA (Pakistan) asked what steps were being taken to promote decentralization and thus provide greater opportunities for creative action by field representatives. He would also welcome comments on the Secretary-General's observations that none of the current proposals for harmonizing and simplifying rules and procedures were sustainable in the long term, given the increased burden that they would impose on country offices.

With regard to cooperation between UNDP and the World Bank, he wondered whether the different strategic visions of the two organizations adversely affected the efforts of UNDP in such areas as poverty eradication. Finally, he would welcome additional information on the Inter-Agency Committee on Women, and particularly on the difference between its work and that of the other Inter-Agency Task Forces.

Ms. KRISHNA (India) asked what progress had been made towards harmonizing the budgets of the various United Nations funds and programmes in order to ensure a more rational use of resources.

Ms. REMMELZWAAL (Netherlands) said that the Council should provide greater policy guidance to United Nations funds and programmes in the area of operational activities. With regard to the division of work among the various agencies, she wondered whether, given the reality of declining core resources, it might be possible for each agency to concentrate only on those areas in which it enjoyed a comparative advantage, thereby avoiding duplication and overlap.

Mr. SYARGEEU (Belarus) welcomed the news that UNDP devoted 90 per cent of its resources to low-income countries. He wondered whether the Programme envisaged any action to further strengthen that approach to the allocation of resource flows.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that it was not clear to her why resident coordinators were required to leave their respective agencies before they could assume their new functions. She noted further that field representatives in some countries were involved in resource mobilization and wondered to what extent that practice impacted on the overall allocation of core resources in the countries concerned.

Mr. JALLOW (Observer for the Gambia) asked what progress had been made by UNFPA in preparing its study on the capacity of recipient countries to absorb development assistance and whether that study was related to the elaboration of an African development strategy.

Mr. GALVEZ (Chile) sought comments on how the strategic vision of each fund and programme was reflected in its internal structures and approaches and on whether mission statements were used to promote a certain profile of the agency concerned within the international community.

Ms. SIRVE (Finland) asked what actions the different funds and programmes proposed to take with a view to achieving greater decentralization.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) asked whether the absence of a mechanism to evaluate the performance of the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Egypt was an exception or the norm.

Mr. FELTON (United Kingdom) asked whether the other United Nations funds and programmes had strengthened collaboration with the Bretton Woods institutions in operational activities at the country level as UNFPA had done.

Mr. AVALLE (Argentina) asked how the discussions on coordination which took place in ACC were being translated into action at the field level. He was

not convinced that the Council was fulfilling its role as the principal coordinating body of the United Nations.

Mr. SPETH (Administrator, United Nations Development Programme), replying to the questions, said that there was a greater lack of coordination in the intergovernmental process than at the level of operational activities and it was time for the Council to fulfil the responsibility entrusted to it by the Charter. In his view, the Council should be split into two committees, one dealing with operational activities and the other continuing the intergovernmental dialogue on issues arising from the global conferences.

As for the evolution of the United Nations system at the country level, competition among the different funds and programmes was normal and even healthy. He noted, however, that progress had been made towards harmonization of programme budget cycles.

Responsibility for the regional coordinator system had originally been entrusted to UNDP because, of all the United Nations funds and programmes, it provided the most resources in terms of time, funding and training and, indeed, focused on development activities. An added justification now was the need for common leadership of the resident coordinator system. However, the Programme did not see itself as competing with its sister agencies but as contributing to United Nations operational activities as a whole. Arrangements were being made to include evaluation of a resident coordinator's performance as part of the overall staff assessment programme. Other agencies should also have an input in that exercise. It would also be helpful for the evaluation mechanism to assess the performance of other heads of country offices in the field of coordination. UNDP would raise that matter at the following meeting of the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ).

Ms. SADIK (Executive Director, United Nations Population Fund) said that the heads of funds and programmes did indeed have certain ideas on what could be done to strengthen the Council's role and those ideas could be exchanged at a later stage. The scenario described by the representative of Denmark was recognizable but she believed that the Organization had now come to realize the value of coordination and decentralization. Considerable progress had been made in the harmonization of the budgets and programmes of the development agencies whose executive boards had also decided to focus on areas

in which they enjoyed a comparative advantage in order to make optimum use of available resources.

With regard to the mobilization of resources at the country level, core resources were mobilized by headquarters and only in specific, non-core areas were resources mobilized by country representatives; the latter nevertheless had a key role to play in the country-level dialogue with other development partners.

Replying to the question posed by the observer for the Gambia, she said that the study of the absorptive capacities of beneficiary countries was not confined to Africa but encompassed all countries which were unable to absorb the resources allocated to them. While UNFPA was not now engaged in preparing an African strategy, it was considering how best to allocate resources among the different groups of countries and intended to participate fully in the implementation of the Special Initiative on Africa.

National execution was often delayed because of limited national capacities, including inadequate financial auditing and reporting systems. Strengthened collaboration with the United Nations system was therefore necessary to develop those capacities.

Ms. BERTINI (Executive Director of the World Food Programme) said that although resolutions and decisions forwarded to the field were accompanied by covering memorandums, care was taken not to reinterpret texts, which were often the result of extensive debate and careful drafting.

On the subject of allowing space for creativity by country representatives, WFP was currently delegating more authority to senior officials in the field so that the Programme's overall goals could be more effectively met.

With regard to the division of labour among the various funds and programmes, an area in which the Council must play a leadership role, the special strength of WFP lay in responding to food emergencies, since it had personnel who were trained in food aid delivery. The Programme had a strategic plan, which included projections of food aid needs, and also consulted closely with other agencies working in the same field.

On the subject of the mobilization of resources by the country representatives of funds and programmes, authority was sometimes given to the country representatives of donor countries and agencies to allocate certain types of resources. In such cases, the field representatives of United Nations

funds and programmes were authorized to pursue those resources within the framework of their programmes' overall needs.

It was now for the Council to demonstrate that it was indeed a new and reformed organ. It must have clear ideas, for example, on what it wanted to achieve in the areas of multilateralism and development and how to achieve it. The Council also needed to be consistent in its efforts to promote greater coordination within the United Nations system. Its actions should be directed not only to the heads of funds and programmes but also to the technical agencies, whose work was equally vital to the success of global development efforts.

The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.

UNITED
NATIONS

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Economic and Social Council

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E/1996/SR.29
22 August 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Substantive session of 1996

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 29th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Wednesday, 10 July 1996, at 3 p.m.

President: Mr. MOUBARAK (Lebanon)
(Vice-President)

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In the absence of Mr. Gervais (Côte d'Ivoire), Mr. Moubarak (Lebanon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (continued)

(c) CONSIDERATION OF THE REPORTS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARDS OF THE UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME/UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND, THE UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND AND THE WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (continued) (E/1996/32, parts I and II, E/1996/64/Add.1 and 3, E/1996/68, E/1996/69, E/1996/73 and E/1996/74; E/1996/L.17; DP/1996/11 and 17)

Ms. SHAM POO (Deputy Executive Director, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), replying to questions raised at the previous meeting, stressed that UNICEF regarded the issues of national execution and capacity-building as critical. National execution through Governments and such national partnerships as non-governmental organizations and grass-roots efforts had long been a cornerstone of UNICEF policy as a means of ensuring sustainability and allowing for the timely phasing-out of the Fund's involvement. That approach to programme delivery had been very successful, even under extremely difficult circumstances.

Regarding payments for common premises, she said that all initial and operating costs were divided among participating agencies, with each paying a share proportional to the amount of space occupied. Turning to the topic of the utilization of core resources, she pointed out that, in the case of all agencies, humanitarian aid was funded through extrabudgetary, not core, resources. UNICEF field representatives had been authorized for many years to raise additional resources in-country, from both donor Governments and the private sector. Such resources, however, were considered to be extrabudgetary and in no way affected the allocation of core resources.

Mr. WILMOT (Ghana) said that in the course of 1996, the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund (UNDP/UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World

Food Programme (WFP) would hold three regular sessions and one annual session. His delegation was of the view that, in order to cut back the cost of conference services, documentation and travel costs, the Executive Boards of those institutions should reduce their regular sessions by one. The reduction would give the secretariats a respite from document preparation that would enable them to carry out proper strategic planning, evaluation and monitoring. Effective working methods, division of work and streamlining in the allocation of agenda items should make it possible for each institution to hold one annual session, preceded by a regular session in the first half of the year and another regular session in the second half of the year.

Considerable attention had been focused on the need to coordinate the operations and activities of the funds and programmes, particularly at the field level, to harmonize budget presentations and to ensure greater budgetary transparency with respect to the use of the resources. In a period of dwindling resources, his delegation welcomed the targeting of resources to needy countries and the emphasis on cost-effective delivery of programmes. It hoped that the new sense of accountability shown by the funds and programmes would result in an additional flow of resources to those bodies.

His delegation welcomed the progress being made in the area of common administrative services and premises. Both the United Nations system agencies and their governmental counterparts would now have the same baseline for the assessment of programmes and performance and would be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes at the national level. The resident coordinator system provided opportunities at the field level for United Nations system agencies to build on previous experience and helped country partners to integrate their assistance in overall national planning and development programmes for maximum effect. The success of the system depended on well-qualified staff; accordingly human resource development was essential. Additional efforts should be made to reinforce the system through the headquarters work of the inter-agency task forces and the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC).

Economic and Social Council resolution 1995/51 highlighted the need to strengthen national capacity for the management and coordination of international assistance and called for high priority to be given to monitoring and evaluation activities and to the implementation of findings. It was time

the funds and programmes redoubled their efforts in those areas, especially in certain parts of Africa and in the least developed countries, where it was particularly difficult to ensure sustainability of programmes.

Ms. BULENOVÁ (Czech Republic) said that her delegation endorsed the statement of the European Union and welcomed the current efforts at reform, particularly those aimed at simplification, harmonization, transparency and accountability. However, it had some doubts as to whether the implemented changes met fully the fundamental needs of countries in transition, especially in terms of the funding, form and content of United Nations assistance. Several funds and programmes had taken into account the specific needs of countries with economies in transition, for example, UNDP had substantially increased assistance to the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). However, some countries still received lower development assistance than others with similar gross domestic product per capita. United Nations assistance to countries in the region should be appropriate to their specific needs in order to eliminate the threat of poverty and social unrest and to prepare those countries for the process of economic liberalization. Assistance to those countries should be focused on the establishment of a democratic, legal and institutional framework for a market economy, on providing infrastructure in the transport, telecommunications, financial and banking sectors, on the liberalization of trade and on completing the process of privatization. In that regard, increased cooperation between the Economic Commission for Europe and UNDP would improve the identification of needs, and the implementation of programme activities in the region.

The Government of the Czech Republic was deeply committed to intraregional cooperation. It intended to establish an institutional framework enabling it to gradually increase its assistance. Currently, her country offered assistance, through the United Nations system, to developing countries in such areas as medicine, water resources, agriculture and industrial technologies. It also offered assistance to countries in the region of Eastern Europe and the CIS in various areas of economic transformation, including privatization, financial system development and the establishment of capital markets.

Mr. ISAKOV (Russian Federation) said the most urgent task was to fine-tune the various mechanisms of the resident coordinator system, especially at the regional and country levels, with an emphasis on broadening the

participation of national governmental bodies in the coordination of operational activities. His delegation endorsed the broadening of the operational and financial responsibilities of the country representatives of programmes and funds, as they played an essential role in strengthening national capacity in management and coordination of assistance.

The inter-agency task force and the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP were making a significant contribution to enhancing the effectiveness of emergency humanitarian assistance. Those organizations had valuable experience in combining emergency assistance with the tasks of development, through the use of an integrated approach which included assistance for rehabilitation and recovery. In order to improve inter-agency cooperation in humanitarian assistance, it was essential to clarify the functions of each organization and to strengthen operational and financial capacities for response.

His delegation welcomed the activities of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP in the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS. UNDP had conducted practical projects in Russia aimed at strengthening government and democratic institutions, promoting socially oriented development and attracting foreign investment. UNDP country projects were being successfully supplemented by regional projects and programmes. In that regard, the UNDP regional office had been particularly active in mobilizing extrabudgetary resources.

Mr. BRESLER (United States of America) said his delegation agreed with the representative of Ghana that consideration should be given to reducing the number of regular sessions of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP to two per year. The sessions could be extended by a few days, leaving adequate time for oversight and for the Boards to receive the information they required in order to discharge their duties. Such a reduction would succeed provided that sound methods of work were used and that statements not germane to the issues were avoided.

Mr. YUAN Shaofu (China) said that, since the introduction of reforms in the work of the governing bodies of the relevant funds and programmes in 1994, the efficiency of their deliberations had noticeably improved, as had their overall guidance of their respective organizations. On the question of the frequency of the governing bodies' sessions, his delegation believed that the first and second regular sessions of those bodies should be consolidated into a single session, whose duration should be increased if necessary. The

Council should provide guidance on the matter, and he wished to hear the Secretariat's views as well.

Mr. WARDHANA (Indonesia) said that his delegation welcomed the increased collaboration between members of the United Nations development system, in particular with respect to reporting. It also welcomed the progress made by the governing bodies of the relevant organizations in response to paragraph 55 of General Assembly resolution 50/120 and was pleased to note that the specialized agencies had responded to paragraph 30 of the resolution on the critical question of supporting and strengthening national execution of United Nations-funded programmes and projects, and that they intended to follow a common reporting format.

He underscored how crucial coordination at the field level was for the purpose of accelerating the promotion and strengthening of capacity-building and national execution. His delegation hoped that UNDP would strengthen its overall cooperation with the regional commissions and was pleased that measures would be introduced to assist the incorporation of regional dimensions in country strategy notes. He requested clarification of the UNDP proposal to assist recipient countries, in particular the least developed countries, to formulate and incorporate such elements in their country strategy notes. Since not all countries had such notes, where necessary an appropriate substitute should be found, bearing in mind the importance of national ownership of regional programmes.

In a recent briefing, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs had stated, with reference to the possibility that the resident coordinators also might coordinate humanitarian assistance in the field, that his Department should remain the lead agency for such assistance. His delegation wished to know what mechanisms would be established if resident coordinators were entrusted with such responsibilities.

The operational activities of the United Nations should be reinforced and directed towards redressing continuing imbalances in international development cooperation. The international community also must mobilize adequate support to strengthen those activities, in particular, through the provision of new and additional resources.

Mr. GALVEZ (Chile) said that his delegation was pleased that UNDP was working to strengthen the resident coordinator system and that the Programme

emphasized national execution and national and local capacity development in the preparation of country strategy notes. He commended UNDP on its humanitarian activities. The mission statement adopted by the Executive Board of UNDP at its annual session was an important document for the conduct of the Programme's work and a very useful tool for informing world public opinion of United Nations efforts to promote human development. Similarly, the mission statement of UNFPA would help to garner public support for the crucial work of the Fund in the battle against AIDS.

His delegation was particularly appreciative of the work of UNICEF in support of the 20/20 initiative, in humanitarian emergencies and in times of war. It welcomed the commitment of WFP to the success of the resident coordinator system, its support for the preparation of country strategy notes and for the programme approach, as well as its efforts to strengthen national capacity for the management and coordination of international assistance, in particular, through the use of advisory services.

Although further progress was desirable with respect to improving monitoring and evaluation in the field, coordinating and harmonizing plans and projects, reducing costs and making projects more attractive to donors, the process of reform and restructuring was progressing smoothly.

Mr. SYARGEEU (Belarus) welcomed the emphasis on the national execution of technical assistance projects and the steps taken by UNDP to coordinate technical assistance at the regional and subregional levels. His delegation agreed with the delegation of the Czech Republic that greater attention should be focused on the countries in transition. His Government urged UNDP to support the convening of an international conference of the countries in transition in the spring of 1997. It also welcomed the positive response by the UNDP secretariat to the letter from the Permanent Representatives of 16 countries in Central and Eastern Europe concerning the need for additional financial resources for the nations in that region. The current resource allocation system was unfair.

His delegation agreed that it was necessary to strengthen the capacity of the funds and programmes to provide emergency assistance and training in disaster preparedness. It favoured the preparation by UNICEF of a new model agreement on cooperation with non-governmental organizations at the regional level. It was essential to ensure that emergency assistance was not provided at

the expense of programme resources, and it was important not to lose sight of the need to ensure a transition from emergency assistance to long-term development. The needs of victims of natural disasters must also be borne in mind. It should be assumed that most emergencies would have long-term consequences; the health problems in his country resulting from the Chernobyl disaster provided a notable example. His delegation was in favour of close coordination between WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA on health care policy issues.

The enhancement of the regional and subregional activities of United Nations funds and programmes would not represent a departure from the country programming approach; on the contrary, it would entail greater involvement on the part of Governments and civil society.

His delegation was in favour of the establishment by UNICEF of a regional office in Geneva for the countries of Eastern Europe and the CIS and the dispatch of missions to various countries in the region. In conclusion, his delegation endorsed the views of the representative of Ghana with respect to the rationalization of the work of the various Executive Boards.

Ms. SEALY MONTEITH (Jamaica) paid a tribute to UNICEF on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. Her delegation welcomed the clear and concise reports prepared by the various Executive Boards on their sessions. She expressed her delegation's sincere appreciation to UNICEF for the assistance it had provided to Jamaica and to the Caribbean region as a whole over the years. Her country looked forward to continuing its participation in the management excellence programme.

Jamaica, like most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, had accomplished most or all of the mid-decade goals established by the World Summit for Children. Nevertheless, those countries would continue to require the assistance of UNICEF and of the United Nations system as a whole as they strove for a better life for all children.

Ms. HENKIN (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that work on harmonizing the presentation of budgets and accounts had begun in 1995 following decisions 95/30 of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board and 1995/37 of the UNICEF Executive Board. For the second regular sessions of the Executive Boards earlier in 1996, the organizations had carried out a comparison of their 1996-1997 budgets. The results indicated that the differences between UNDP and UNFPA on the one hand and UNICEF on the other were significant, concerning not

only presentation but also the scope and content of the budget. However, the different nature of the three organizations must be taken into account: UNDP was essentially a funding organization which also provided and financed support for the operational activities of the United Nations system as a whole; UNICEF was a funding and implementing organization; and UNFPA was a funding organization which also executed parts of its programme.

At the annual session of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board in May 1996, and subsequently at that of the UNICEF Executive Board in June 1996, the organizations had reported that they were addressing harmonization under five main headings: scope and content, and specifically the applicability to UNFPA and UNDP of the integrated budget approach recently adopted by UNICEF involving the inclusion of programme activity estimates in the biennial budget document; definitions, whereby an in-depth analysis was being undertaken to identify clearly what constituted programme activities as opposed to activities in support of programmes; common presentation styles, and specifically the development of a common or fully comparable table reflecting resource utilization; harmonization of key budgetary classifications; and common terminology for the identification of primary groupings of resources.

Further progress had been reported at the annual session of the UNICEF Executive Board in June 1996 on the development of a common resource plan and the related definitions or components to be included under each heading. The resource plan would have three sections: total resources available to the organization; the use of resources, classified under three main headings; and the reconciliation of the estimates included under the use of resources with the budget estimates. The Executive Board of UNICEF had adopted decision 1996/16, which in turn had been endorsed by the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board, on the question of the timing and nature of future reports on budget harmonization.

Mrs. REBONG (Philippines) said that immediate steps must be taken to implement paragraphs 76 and 78 of General Assembly resolution 50/227 in order to reduce the proliferation and overlapping of formal and informal meetings of governing bodies of the United Nations development programmes and funds and ensure the effective participation of observer member States and observer States in the sessions of the Executive Boards.

Mr. STENSBOL (Observer for Denmark) said that his delegation appreciated the progress made so far by UNFPA and looked forward its future efforts.

Mr. CHATAIGNER (France) asked whether UNFPA would be able to prepare a new budget for 1998-1999 within the timetable for the harmonization process; whether further working meetings would be held between September 1996 and the time of transmission of the budget information to ACABQ; and whether the working documentation of the September session of the Executive Boards would be made available in all the working languages.

Mr. HJELMAKER (Sweden) said that his delegation was gratified that progress was being made in the budget harmonization process. The joint progress report was a very good step in the right direction. He endorsed the comments made by the representative of the Philippines.

Ms. BERGERON (Canada) said that the results achieved by UNFPA were very encouraging.

Ms. HENKIN (United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)) said that UNFPA expected to be able to present the 1998-1999 budget within the timetable, especially if there was a productive dialogue at the informal meetings that would be held, one before September 1996, and others before the submission was made to ACABQ. UNFPA would take up the matter of the availability of working documentation in all languages with the secretariats of the Executive Boards.

Mr. RAZA (Pakistan) said that, on the subject of the status of mission statements, it had been made clear in decisions by UNDP and UNFPA that those statements were for the internal use of organizations, as distinct from policy statements. Some confusion appeared to exist in UNICEF; decision 1996/27 referred to the UNICEF mission statement and relevant documents. A clear distinction must be drawn in any decisions taken by the Council.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to decision 1996/18, entitled "Commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the operations of the United Nations Children's Fund", contained in chapter III of the report of the UNICEF Executive Board on its second regular session of 1996 (E/1996/32, part II). He took it that the Council endorsed the decision and recommended its approval to the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT suggested that the Council should take note of the following documents: reports of the UNICEF Executive Board on its first and second regular sessions of 1996 (E/1996/32, Parts I and II); note by the Secretary-General transmitting the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled

"United Nations system common premises and services in the field" and the comments of the Administrative Committee on Coordination thereon (E/1996/43 and A/51/124-E/1996/44); report of the Secretary-General entitled "Progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 50/120" (E/1996/64 and Add.1, Add.2 and Corr.1, and Add.3); annual report of UNFPA to the Council (E/1996/68); annual report of UNICEF to the Council (E/1996/69); note by the Secretariat on strengthening collaboration between the United Nations development system and the Bretton Woods institutions in the areas of social and economic development at all levels, including the field level (E/1996/72); report of the Executive Board of the World Food Programme (E/1996/73); report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its annual session for 1996 (E/1996/74); report of the UNICEF Executive Board on its 1996 annual session (E/1996/L.19); report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its first regular session of 1996 (DP/1996/11); and report of the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board on its second regular session of 1996 (DP/1996/17).

It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.